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Case studies

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# “If you could do one thing...”

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The integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers





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The British Academy project “If you could do one thing...” set out to examine successful integration projects, drawing lessons from clear evidence about methods that can improve social integration and result in long-term cohesion in our society.

The case studies in this publication, generously supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation, look at the integration experiences of recently arrived migrants. Each case study describes a different type of intervention and the collection overall has a focus on young people, with a view to understanding how initial experiences of integration affect longer-term settlement into society.

These cases studies are accompanied by a collection of essays which bring academic viewpoints and research on social integration together with examples of practical interventions and activities that have been shown to make significant positive impact.

**phf** Paul Hamlyn  
Foundation

Paul Hamlyn Foundation was established by Paul Hamlyn in 1987. Upon his death in 2001, he left most of his estate to the Foundation, creating one of the largest independent grant-making foundations in the UK. Our mission is to help people overcome disadvantage and lack of opportunity, so that they can realise their potential and enjoy fulfilling and creative lives.

We have a particular interest in supporting young people and a strong belief in the importance of the arts and social justice is the golden thread that links all our work.

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# Foreword

Migration can be a positive experience for many – enriching communities, empowering individuals, and generating economic growth. However, it can also be accompanied by hardship and trauma. The outlook depends greatly on initial circumstances, the resources that are available to an individual, and the political and social attitudes that new arrivals encounter.

For over ten years, Paul Hamlyn Foundation has taken an interest in supporting interventions related to migration. Since 2012, the Foundation has funded work to improve the advice, support and information available to young people who migrate to the UK, many of whom are without settled status and risk ‘falling through the cracks’. Currently, the Foundation supports work that helps young people who have migrated to stay safe and thrive, as well as initiatives which help communities experiencing high levels of migration to become stronger and more connected.

When the British Academy approached Paul Hamlyn Foundation to propose this important work, it was clear the Academy wanted to do something different, and this report encourages us to look beyond headlines at some of the basic realities of those arriving here and attempting to integrate.

Migration is too often discussed in terms of large numbers – facts and figures, flows in and out. The case studies contained within this report highlight familiar stories of confusion, mistrust and the slow building of confidence. The examples offer a reminder that significant attention and care is needed in the often-slow process to help people integrate and communities to adjust. They provide an understanding of some of the factors that help these new members of communities to integrate in particular settings and, where possible, highlight aspects which may be transferable.



We hope that this important and timely resource will help local authorities, charities and practitioners to identify practical steps that can help to integrate individuals who migrate and seek asylum into our society.

**Moira Sinclair**  
Chief Executive, Paul Hamlyn Foundation



**This report  
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beyond headlines at some  
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# Executive Summary

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While there exists a good body of evidence on social integration in the UK, little has been done previously to draw together the evidence from different sources and provide local government, charities or other organisations with practical tools to help them to tackle issues that affect their communities.

The British Academy's social integration project "If you could do one thing..." aimed to change that and to find examples of practical and effective local initiatives to support the integration of migrants and minorities in Britain, and share them more widely. Ideally the examples would involve no more than modest costs. This collection of case studies is focussed on support for recently arrived migrants and refugees, with a particular emphasis on young people.

The themes running through these case studies reflect the major themes arising from the call for evidence<sup>1</sup> issued by the Academy in Spring 2017, such as the key role of learning English for integration, the need to confront and resolve local tensions rather than leave them to fester, the need to build trust and confidence of marginalized communities, and the need to involve members of the migrant communities themselves in the design and implementation of the projects.

The case studies describe a range of activities, undertaken by local councils, Police, voluntary organisations, schools and partnerships. They cover arrangements from welcoming and supporting newly arrived migrants, help with learning English, tackling community tensions and identifying modern slavery.



### The case studies are:

- **Baca** is a charity based in the Midlands. **Baca works in partnership with local authorities** and is funded by a wide range of charities with core funding from Lloyds Bank Foundation. It offers **an alternative to local authority foster care, providing accommodation and specialised support for newly-arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children** (16 to 18-year olds). These young people are often deeply traumatised and rates of running away from care tend to be high. The Baca model, drawing on **specialist support, a phased programme of help, and an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of young asylum seekers** has shown considerable promise in reducing rates of disappearance and high rates of moving into further education.
- **RUBIC** is a project based in a deprived area of Sheffield. The project (involving a consortium of local charities, with support from the City Council) seeks to **tackle the forces that threaten to undermine community cohesion**. The hub of the project is Parkwood Academy secondary school, but a key aspect of the project is to **work with the children’s families and with the wider community**. Schools cannot be treated in isolation from the wider community. An innovative aspect of the programme is the **training of Young Community Leaders who can mediate between different groups**, as well as between the community and the city council.
- **St Edmund’s Nursery School and Children’s Centre** works in a deprived area of Bradford. The initiative is designed to help **provide preschool education and support to Roma families who have recently arrived from Central and Eastern Europe**. Roma are highly disadvantaged within the educational system, and because of their experiences before migration tend to be very distrustful of official bodies. St Edmund’s have developed active measures to proactively **build trust and links with the Roma community**. A key feature is a **Roma family support worker (himself from a Roma background) and other staff from Central, Eastern European and Roma backgrounds**. The project has successfully secured preschool enrolments from Roma families and has helped their children to close the attainment gap. It provides Roma families with a **positive experience of early years provision** and helps to **overcome suspicion of mainstream services** more generally.
- **Xenia** is a **volunteer initiative** based in Hackney, London. It is designed to **help migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women learn English and strengthen social ties** in the community. Research has highlighted the barriers to learning English faced by migrant women, with a lack of **child care facilities**, isolation and poverty being major obstacles. Xenia brings migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women and British women together for **accessible workshops** that build English language skills and create connections across perceived divides of language, culture, ethnicity, race, age and identity. The group plays a **complementary role to formal ESOL provision**, providing opportunities to improve learners’ speaking skills and confidence, whilst at the same time strengthening social ties in communities. Being a **women-only group** is central to its success.
- The name **Refuweegee** comes from the term ‘Weegie’, meaning a Glaswegian and the aim of Refuweegee is to **extend this Glaswegian camaraderie to members of newly arrived communities**. Every asylum seeker arriving in Glasgow receives a **welcome pack** from Refuweegee, which also helps **fill gaps in services, providing struggling families and individuals with anything from pushchairs to mobile phones**. Primarily based on volunteers and donations (but also working in partnership with local organisations) Refuweegee operates in a similar way to a social movement, **using social media to engage citizens in voluntary action**.
- **Aik Saath** (which means ‘Together As One’ in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu) is a charity, **founded by young people** in Slough who wanted to end Asian gang violence. Aik Saath’s mission (now Lottery-funded) is to **work with people from all communities, faiths and backgrounds** to promote and encourage peace, human rights and **community cohesion through peer-led education**. The aspect of the charity’s work that is featured in this publication is its **youth-led heritage projects** that create opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to understand each other better, and to **adopt alternative narratives around place and belonging**.
- **Rushmoor Borough Council**. Rushmoor has a strong military history, with the 1st Battalion of the Gurkha Rifles based in the area for almost thirty years. An influx of **new arrivals, many of them older Nepalese, transformed the demographics of the borough** and presented significant challenges to the Council, in terms of service delivery, and in relation to **managing tensions arising from the rapid pace of change**. Through an ESOL Volunteers Forum and a range of other initiatives the council has played an important role in **helping older people in the Nepali community to feel less isolated** and to learn basic English. Central to the success of Rushmoor’s efforts has been support from the **Gurkha Settlement Fund**, illustrating the transformative effect dedicated funding can have.
- **Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Migrant Workers Police Community Support Officers**. Many migrants are at risk from the threats posed by **modern slavery, including exploitation by rogue gangmasters, human trafficking and illegal and exploitative working conditions**. These activities often go undetected. Since 2010, Devon and Cornwall Police has had in post two **Migrant Worker Police Community Support Officers (secured through a successful application to the Migrant Impact Fund)**. The PCSOs work intensively with migrants and their employers to **build trust in the police and understand the problems**. The **Migrant Workers Facebook page** has over 1,200 friends and is an important part of operations. Not only does it allow the PCSOs to **reach the migrant population with information and advice, it enables people to send messages anonymously to the PCSOs**.

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# Baca: Supporting the integration of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

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## Summary

The Baca Charity is a holistic intervention, based in the Midlands and East of England, for newly arrived Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) aged 16 to 18 that supports their transition to adulthood and independent living, and promotes integration. This includes supporting very vulnerable and traumatised young people who have been victims of trafficking.

- Baca provides an alternative care provision for UASC, which is cheaper than foster care and provides specialised tailored support, focussed on building young people’s resilience and promoting independence.
- The charity provides a phased intervention, that responds to UASC’s needs at five key stages.
- The model is holistic and is supported by a Theory of Change, which is rooted in an excellent understanding of UASC’s needs, complemented by effective partnership working.<sup>2</sup>
- Baca Staff offer exceptional levels of individual support and protection, with young people and stakeholders frequently describing Baca as “like family”.
- Baca offers young people pathways to education, training and employment.
- The charity helps young people with their mental health and to deal with trauma.
- It has been observed that UASC who pass through Baca have better outcomes than other unaccompanied and trafficked young people.





## 1 Background

The UK has experienced a significant increase in the number of asylum applications from Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).

The number of UASC in local authority care in England more than doubled between 2013 and 2016.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that local authorities will continue to see growing numbers of UASC in their care. Research highlights the challenges and high costs associated with caring for UASC, with shortages in foster care placements a major obstacle.<sup>4</sup> Large numbers of UASC aged 16 to 18 end up in private sector shared housing with varying levels of support.<sup>5</sup> The needs of UASC are complex, particularly those who have been victims of trafficking. These young people harbour an extreme distrust of authority and many are at the mercy of traffickers. The first instinct of these young people is often to flee from local authority care. Between 2014 and 2015, 28 per cent of trafficked children and 13 per cent of unaccompanied children looked after by local authorities went missing at least once. Of these, over a quarter had not been found.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 About Baca

Baca is a registered charity based in Loughborough, founded in 2007, which supports newly arrived UASC aged 16–18.

The charity was founded by Rebecca Griffiths, a youth worker, in response to a lack of suitable, specialist provisions for 16–18-year-old asylum seekers, with the goal of providing safety and support to these young people and helping them to rebuild their lives and succeed in the future. Griffiths brought on board a small team with experience in the youth and charity sector.

The young people Baca supports are forced migrants, and many have been victims of trafficking. They have either travelled to the UK unaccompanied, or have been separated from their parents on route. In some cases, their parents and other family members have died during the journey. These young people are extremely vulnerable and often deeply traumatised. Many have been victims of torture and rape at the hands of their traffickers or have witnessed extreme scenes of violence and deprivation along the way.

Baca works in partnership with seven local authorities across the Midlands to provide specialist care provision for up to 28 UASC at any one time. Baca's ten years' experience of working with unaccompanied children offers a wealth of knowledge and expertise in understanding and responding to their needs. The charity has an excellent track record in securing positive outcomes for UASC and preventing these young people from running away. Only 5 per cent of young people at Baca have gone missing from care in the last two and a half years. Of these, two returned to Baca and the third was suspected of being over 18 and was thus running away to avoid removal to the adult asylum system. Baca has an 89 per cent success rate of young people in their care completing at least one year of college, with many continuing education or training beyond this.



The number  
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Baca's ten years'  
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and responding to  
their needs

### 3 Baca’s phased intervention model

At the heart of Baca’s success is a highly effective and holistic ‘phased’ intervention model, that is based in a profound understanding of, and which can respond and adapt to, UASC’s needs at five distinct points in time.

#### Phase One - Safety

This phase encompasses days one and two and focusses on safety. When a young person arrives at Baca, often having been picked up by staff from a police station, they tend to be extremely scared, unable to speak English and distrustful of adults and authority. The young person is taken to one of Baca’s ‘new arrivals houses’, which provide highly supported accommodation, including a live-in support worker, and a homely atmosphere. Three to four young people will live together, staying for an average of four months, before moving into a ‘semi-independent house’. Where possible, young people who have travelled together are housed together.

These first two days are critical. The young person is usually extremely tired, hungry and in need of a wash and a change of clothes. They are also assessing whether they trust their new environment and if they are safe. Baca addresses their basic needs by providing safe shelter, food, clothing, and toiletries, and gives them an initial medical assessment through an interpreter. Key personal details are collected, a photo is taken (particularly necessary in case of them running away) and an inventory of personal items is compiled. Baca issues them with an identity card. A risk assessment is completed and if there is felt to be a risk of the young person running away, a safety plan is introduced, which can include removal of access to internet and phones. In some cases, additional support workers monitor the young person 24 hours a day. Baca will start to ascertain what, if any, family connections the young person has.

#### Phase Two – Routine and basic needs

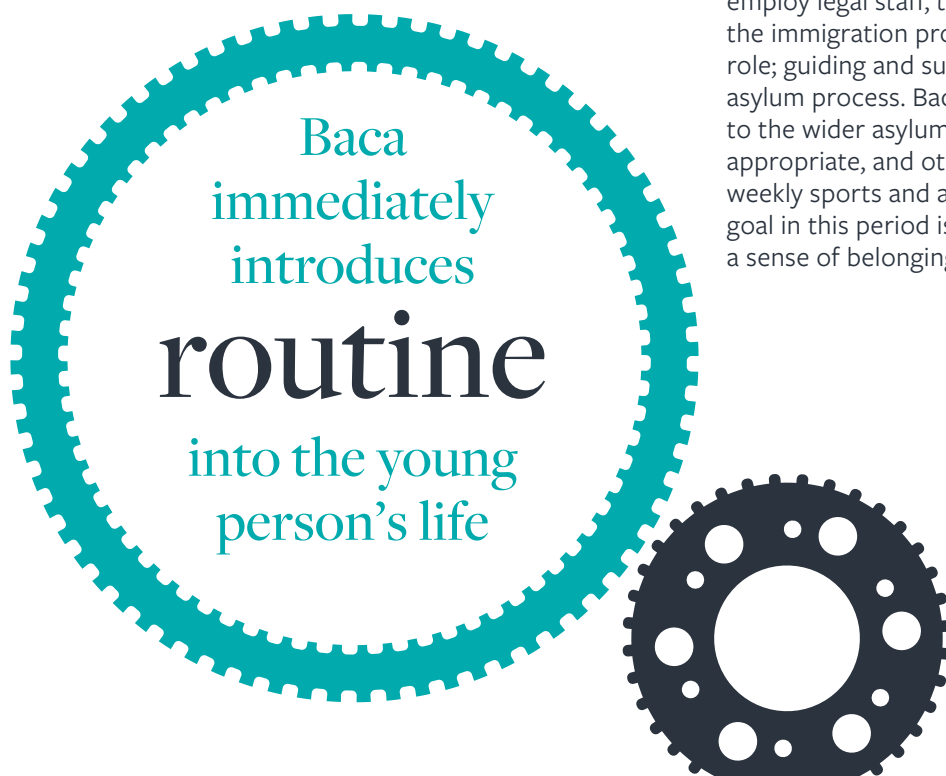
The next stage of a young person’s journey at Baca takes place over the following two weeks. Baca immediately introduces routine into the young person’s life. The young person begins ESOL classes, delivered by Baca, on the first working day after they arrive. The introduction of structure and routine is crucial as it has a stabilising impact. Despite resistance from some, the positive outcomes of young people at Baca long-term is testament to this approach.

“Structure helps the young people get out of developing, or continuing with, bad habits. They have just arrived, and have been travelling generally during the night, and then sleeping during the day, so their sleep patterns are out. They are also very open to exploitation... These young people are very isolated...It is about plugging them into the right provision at the right time. This is what we do at Baca.”

**Louise Jarvis, Managing Director at Baca**

Within this two-week period, young people are registered with doctors and dentists, undergo further health checks, and are accompanied on trips into town to choose and buy new clothes. They are taken on weekly food trips, thus getting to know their way around and learning how and where to go shopping for essentials. The support workers help them to budget for, and choose, their own food, using their personal allowance, and, where necessary, teach them to cook. These young people are usually still extremely disorientated during this period.

Baca also supports the young person to begin the process of seeking asylum. They are accompanied to meetings with the Home Office and age assessments, and helped to understand the legal process. Baca deliberately does not employ legal staff, to separate their role and mission from the immigration process. The team adopts a quasi-parental role; guiding and supporting the young person through the asylum process. Baca begins to connect the young person to the wider asylum-seeker community, faith groups where appropriate, and other Baca young people, and they join weekly sports and arts activities and trips. The overarching goal in this period is to enable young people to begin to feel a sense of belonging and to help them feel safe.





Efforts are made to support young people to tackle the trauma they are likely to be experiencing

### Phase Three – In-house education, improving mental health and integration

This phase takes place during months one to four, when young people start to become more settled and confident in their abilities to communicate and live more independently. The young people are preparing for the move to mainstream education as their language skills and wellbeing improve. Baca has very good links with education providers in the region, allowing a smoother transfer for the young people. During this phase they take responsibility for their own cooking and cleaning in the house.

At this point the young person's mental health is brought into focus. All support staff are trained in different areas of mental health awareness. The young people attend therapeutic art sessions, allowing them the opportunity to start to process and share experiences in a non-verbal way. Physical activity workshops also assist young people to deal with trauma. Their level of risk is continually reassessed and over time the young person is given full freedom.

As part of the process of helping them to integrate into British society, the young people are taught about the role of the police, which is likely to be very different to where they come from, and taught how to react to any racist comments they receive. Baca also takes young people on trips to visit more places in the UK so that they get an understanding of Britain's landscapes, history and culture, and engages them in local events and activities. They are also encouraged to join the local gym and have access to swimming lessons.

During this period young people register with a solicitor and are supported to prepare their asylum case. The young person will be expected to share their often-harrowing story, sometimes repeatedly, and the support worker is fundamental in helping them through this traumatic process. Baca works with social workers to put in place pathway plans for each young person and completes monthly reports,

based around Every Child Matters Categories.<sup>7</sup> If the young person wishes, efforts are made to trace missing families, such as through the Red Cross Family Tracing Service.

### Phase Four – Growing independence skills

This stage takes place after about four months (a little longer if necessary). The young person moves into a semi-independent house, where they will remain for the rest of their time with Baca. In this house the young person is responsible for taking care of all their own needs and is also encouraged to save £5 a week in a building society account. At this point, young people are encouraged to take up volunteering or work experience roles (depending on what decision, if any, has been reached on their legal status). They are encouraged to join local clubs and sports teams, initially accompanied by support workers and then independently. They are also supported to make appointments over the phone and to keep up with medical appointments.

Further efforts are made to support young people to tackle the trauma they are likely to be experiencing, including through accessing specialist counselling sessions through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and bereavement counselling where appropriate. Conflict resolution skills are developed to help them to get along well in their shared houses and resolve any difficulties constructively. This period is very much focussed on strengthening young people's resilience and independent living skills. As time passes, young people have opportunities to spend nights away to visit friends or other parts of the UK. Trips away are always carefully monitored and risk assessed.

## Phase Five – Moving on post-18

The final phase takes place at the point at which a young person is ready to move on, usually at the age of 18. Baca helps the young person to explore their options, including finding appropriate accommodation. Where necessary, their support worker will help them with the move, including setting up utility bill payments, buying furniture and accessing any benefits. Young people are encouraged to progress to further education and supported through the process of applying. A strong focus is placed on ensuring that young people know how to stay safe and how to access support when they need it.

## 4 Baca’s approach to mental health

Mental health is one of the most challenging aspects of Baca’s work. Baca staff report feeling overwhelmed at times by the high levels of need.

They have observed that symptoms of traumas often begin to surface a couple of months after young people arrive, for example, through nightmares and panic attacks. Up until that point young people have been in survival mode, but as they begin to settle, the trauma begins to emerge. An external evaluation of Baca<sup>8</sup> highlights the degree to which young people at Baca struggle with mental health issues, with over half reporting difficulties sleeping, an indicator of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Liz Moore, an NHS Specialist for Looked After Children (SPLAC) nurse who works closely with Baca, explains that poor mental health is often exacerbated by young people not knowing where their parents or siblings are, as well as the asylum process. She observes that they function much better as a result of time spent at Baca. Luke Sebit-Berridge, a social worker who worked with Baca, suggests that Baca’s support helps to keep young people’s anxiety levels down and helps them adapt to a new culture and environment. He adds that the attachments they form at, and with, Baca provide “[a] blueprint for how they can trust people”.<sup>9</sup>



One of the key ways in which Baca supports young people is through engaging them in physical activity, which gives them space from the stress and anxiety they are experiencing and creates a greater sense of physical and mental wellbeing. Another approach is through one-to-one therapeutic arts sessions. Baca staff observe that the young people are often not ready to speak about their experiences, and that talking therapies are not always appropriate. This could be due to language barriers, cultural backgrounds or the stigma that can be attached to talking about mental health. A feeling of loneliness is frequently expressed by UASC, and much of Baca’s work focusses on helping young people forge connections and trust others. Support staff are also starting to be trained in ‘Teaching Recovery Techniques’, developed by the Children in War Foundation.<sup>10</sup> This provides techniques for developing coping strategies so that the young people can begin to gain some control over any trauma symptoms.

“ There was one young girl who had lost her mother in one of the boats. It was recognised that she just hadn’t had the chance to grieve for that. So, she was taken through that bereavement process, and a support worker took her to a nearby cemetery where she was able to lay some flowers...”

**Louise Jarvis, Managing Director at Baca**

Baca staff observe that young people in their care tend to be very forward-looking, and engaging them in shaping their own futures through education and other opportunities has a positive impact. Much of Baca’s work is around giving these young people the tools they need to minimise the impact of trauma in their day-to-day lives.

Many aspects  
of Baca’s model  
are potentially  
transferable

## 5 Improving outcomes through understanding complex needs

Staff at Baca emphasise that teenagers can be difficult whatever their life experience but that the teenagers at Baca are often traumatised and having to deal with growing up away from their families and in a very different culture.

Staff have observed the difficulties faced at times by foster carers, social workers and others in understanding and adapting to the behaviour of UASC, and that bad behaviour is sometimes misinterpreted as a lack of gratitude.

Young people at Baca often feel very let down when they arrive in the UK, having been sold unrealistic stories by traffickers and others about what their new life will be like. Many find it difficult to accept that they cannot live in London and some believe that they would be better off with their traffickers. Many are terrified about the repercussions of not repaying traffickers, fearing for their own safety and that of family back home. Staff sometimes have to work very hard and patiently to help young people to understand that Baca is providing them with a positive opportunity. Staff recall the story of one girl who had run away from previous care placements before being moved into Baca's care.

When she finally settled, she was asked by staff what had persuaded her to stay. She explained that it was seeing other young girls at Baca excelling, including one girl in her house who was hoping to become a doctor and another who was in college.

**“It’s not just about stopping them running, it’s about giving them a reason not to run – giving them a reason to stay.”**

**Jimmy Zachariah, Service Manager at Baca**

The limbo that young people face because of the asylum process is probably the greatest challenge they face whilst at Baca. They do not know what will happen to them and are faced with complex legal processes. Young people wait varying amounts of time for application outcomes and, since they have no idea whether they will be able to stay, this can demotivate them from attending college and engaging in community activities. Baca keeps young people focussed on moving forward in this period – on routine, learning, and keeping well. They support them to talk about the frustration they are feeling.

### Lydia, aged 18

Lydia was found in a lorry on a cold night in December. It is believed she had been trafficked from Ethiopia, through Sudan and Libya into Europe, and had suffered torture and exploitation.

On route she was separated from her younger brother and still does not know what happened to him. Lydia was picked up by police, which saved her from being met by a trafficker and brought into slavery.

Baca met Lydia at the police station and brought her into their care. Lydia was very fearful and unable to trust those around her. She did not know any English and, with no prior education, was illiterate in her first language. Lydia struggled to make friends and showed signs of having an eating disorder. Through the ESOL support it became clear that her needs were different from other learners, so Baca split the class, which had a positive impact on her confidence, learning and well-being. Once Lydia started college, Baca continued to support her with English, ICT and numeracy. She is now doing well at college, passing two exams in her first academic year – a remarkable achievement considering her background.

Lydia spent 12 sessions with Baca's arts specialist sharing her story in a therapeutic context. Together they made a hand drawn, life-sized self-portrait, and over the weeks she shared and wrote her story around the drawing. Lydia was able to share the “good” and “bad” sides of her life story in Ethiopia and experiences of travelling to the UK. The opportunity to share her story in a safe and accepting environment had a positive impact on her mental health.

A key factor in Lydia's recovery and empowerment has been sport. She loves running. Baca established links with a local running club where she is now independently attending and competing. She has received advice from dieticians to improve her understanding of how diet affects her energy, health and ability to race.

Making friends at the running club has been significant in her integration into the community, and she has made a lot of progress in processing trauma and managing emotions.

Though she recently turned 18, she remains at Baca due to her vulnerability.<sup>11</sup>



## 6 Conclusion

The Baca model has grown organically over the last ten years, building up expertise and forging strong connections with local community partners and services.

Many aspects of Baca’s model are potentially transferable. At the heart of Baca’s success is an important message about the need to understand UASC better.

“ I think the transferability is in understanding these young people; understanding their history, their background, the cultural nuances, the trauma, the practicalities of need, and the need for holistic support. If that can be captured, learned and understood, then it is down to individual organisations and services how they apply it.”

**Louise Jarvis, Managing Director at Baca**

Baca’s model underlines the importance of phased, holistic and specialised approaches when working with UASC. Baca not only meets the basic needs of these young people, it addresses every aspect of their personal, social and emotional development, with a focus on building resilience. The charity gives these young people a strong foothold in a new culture and society, so that when they leave Baca’s care, they can live independently.



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# RUBIC: A whole community approach to tackling community tensions and promoting social integration

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# 2



## Summary

The RUBIC project is a new, innovative, multi-partner project in north Sheffield that is centred on a local secondary school, Parkwood Academy, and its catchment area. The project aims to build social cohesion and promote integration across the whole community through a series of complementary initiatives over three years.

- RUBIC was developed by five organisations, with different skills and mandates, recognising that to address the complex forces that undermine cohesion locally, it was necessary to work together and to employ different, yet complementary, approaches.
  - Much of the activity takes place in a school, but the project works closely with parents and the wider community, recognising that influences on young people beyond the school gate play a significant role in shaping their attitudes and behaviour.
  - RUBIC is strongly rooted in the local community, giving it leverage to facilitate change, and has the support of Sheffield City Council.
- The project consists of five complementary interventions, led by the different partners:
    - 1 Safe Space Dialogues that enable people in the community from different backgrounds to understand each other better;
    - 2 A Community Guardians programme, which gives local people, including young people, the opportunity to learn conflict resolution skills;
    - 3 A New Arrivals Support Group that helps migrant, asylum seeker and refugee students settle into secondary school;
    - 4 An awareness raising and befriending scheme for children in primary schools; and
    - 5 A leadership scheme that empowers young people to become community influencers.





## 1 Background

The area of north Sheffield in which Parkwood Academy is located is among the 5 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. As members of new communities have moved in, resentment has mounted, with struggling families becoming increasingly anxious about the burden being placed on already overstretched public services.

Some people have a perception that resources are being unfairly channelled towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This further compounds the problem, as do inflammatory remarks in the media, and negative rhetoric surrounding immigration more generally. A lack of social mixing between members of the newly arrived and established communities' limits opportunities for people to understand each other's perspectives and experiences and to forge connections.

## 2 About RUBIC

RUBIC (which stands for Respect and Understanding – Building Inclusive Communities) is a partnership between five organisations:

- **Chilypep**, a young person's service;
- **'Who is Your Neighbour' (WIYN)**, a community dialogue project;
- **City of Sanctuary Sheffield (CoSS)**, a charity that supports the integration of new arrivals;
- **Mediation Sheffield (MESH)**, a community mediation charity; and
- **Parkwood Academy secondary school**, which acts as the central hub for this project.

Developed over two years through in-depth consultation with local people, including parents and children, the project is funded by Big Lottery Reaching Communities with a grant of just under £500,000 over three years.

The partnership is based on connections forged through the Sheffield Cohesion Advisory Group (CAG), supported by Sheffield City Council and also builds upon the existing relationships that Chilypep has with local organisations and communities, including Parkwood Academy, who they have worked with periodically over the last 15 years. Professor Richard Tomlins, Visiting Professor of Race and Diversity at Coventry University, leads on the project's evaluation.

## 3 Parkwood Academy

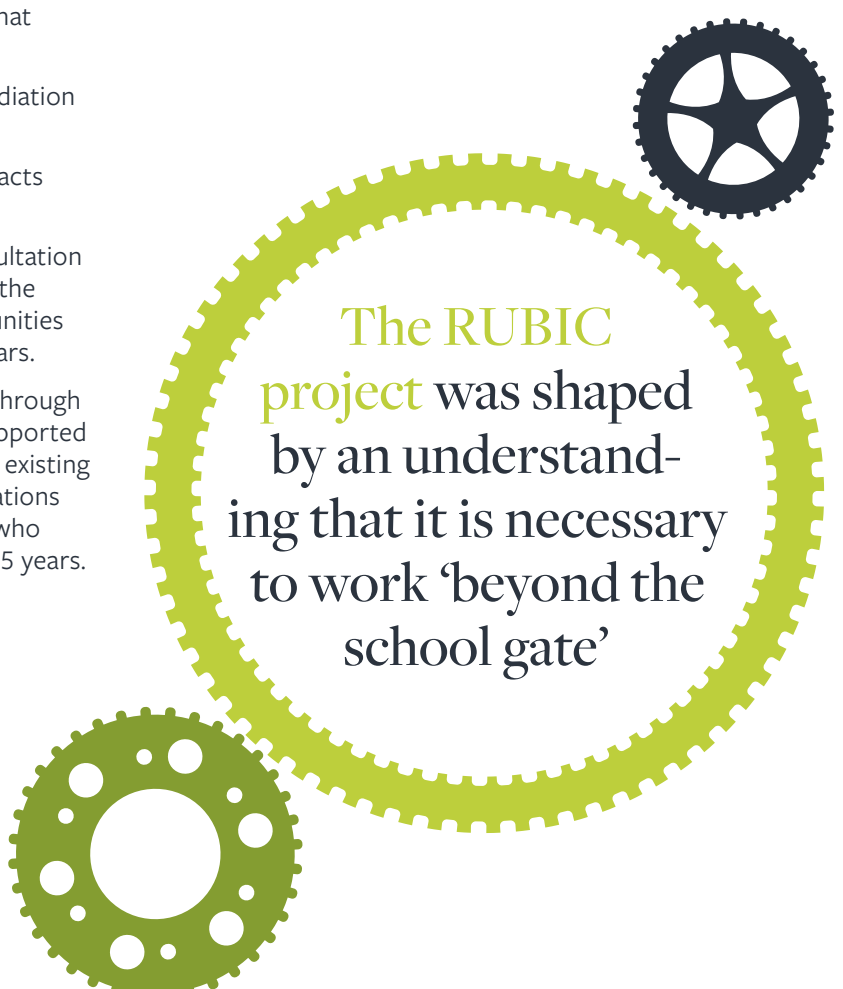
Parkwood Academy has an extremely diverse student population, made up of 41 per cent Black And Minority Ethnic, 11 per cent Roma and 8 per cent Eastern European students.

The school is in the heart of a traditionally white working-class community, making it a meeting place for students from all backgrounds.

**“We want to make cohesion in the school as important as achieving good academic outcomes.”**

**Paul Howard, Community Liaison Officer and former Deputy Head at Parkwood Academy**

Despite the strong commitment of Parkwood Academy to promoting cohesion, the local area has been identified as an area of high tension. Students consulted during the RUBIC project planning stages confirmed this, emphasising that a gap exists between the welcoming ethos of the school and the attitudes held in their homes. The RUBIC project was therefore shaped by an understanding that it is necessary to work 'beyond the school gate' with families and the wider community. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds also spoke of feeling that other students did not understand their cultural backgrounds and religions and sometimes made derogatory remarks.



**The RUBIC project was shaped by an understanding that it is necessary to work 'beyond the school gate'**

## 4 RUBIC activities

RUBIC began in March 2017 and will run for three years. Although the project is new and is yet to yield evidence of concrete outcomes, its experimental approach is unique.

The project brings people together from the voluntary and statutory sector, working holistically with both parents and students. The project comprises five complementary activities which take place in and around Parkwood Academy.

### Safe space dialogue sessions

These sessions are led by Who Is Your Neighbour (WIYN), an organisation highly skilled in facilitating community dialogue in settings of heightened tensions. During these sessions, parents and others in the community come together for facilitated ‘intra-community’ discussions. These are conversations where participants can speak in their own groups about people who are “not like us” and about how their neighbourhood is changing. They can be open about fears and concerns and their experience is valued. During these conversations people do think about their own attitudes to others and the goal is to promote greater curiosity and openness to understanding others. These sessions are followed by ‘inter- community’ dialogues, which bring different communities together to share their fears and concerns and to work together to resolve them. An average of 12-15 people attend each session and WIYN then supports people to hold conversations in their own communities.

“ People rarely get the chance to talk about how their area is changing, how they feel about these changes, and how these changes affect them. As part of RUBIC people will have the opportunity to talk and work things out together. Working simultaneously with young people, parents and the wider community is important. Young people occupy different worlds. The life and culture of school can be very different from that of home or that of their peers. It is important that we straddle these different worlds, if we are to have a deeper impact.”

**Tariq Bashir, Project Manager at WIYN**



The project  
brings people together  
from the voluntary  
and statutory sector,  
working holistically  
with both parents  
and students.

### Community Guardians

This programme is led by Mediation Sheffield (MESH), through which around 50 community members, including young people attending Parkwood Academy and other schools, are undertaking an accredited training programme to become Community Guardians. The Community Guardians work in their communities to recognise the warning signs of community tension and mediate disputes, both between members of the community, and between communities and statutory agencies. The Community Guardians receive regular ongoing training and support, plus individual and small group supervision.

### New arrivals support group

Chilypep, an organisation with many years’ experience delivering services to vulnerable young people in south Yorkshire, is leading a New Arrivals Support Group, which meets fortnightly to support migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking young people, helping them to adapt to life in the UK and to overcome trauma. Newly arrived students in Parkwood Academy and other local schools often face multiple challenges to settling into school. This includes difficulties with English language and with adapting to the English school system, which can be vastly different to what they are used to. Many of them have missed out on significant chunks of their education, causing them to struggle academically. These young people often face psychological issues due to traumatic experiences and the challenges associated with adapting to life in a new country. Parkwood Academy staff have observed that difficulties faced by newly arrived students can manifest as disruptive behaviour in the classroom. However, with the right support, newly arrived young people often go on to excel academically.

### Awareness raising and befriending scheme

This aspect of the project is led by City of Sanctuary Sheffield (CoSS). Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking students can be susceptible to bullying, as their status as newcomers makes them easy targets. To address this, workshops are held in primary schools and secondary schools, that allow children to hear the experiences of newly arrived children first-hand. This is coupled with a befriending and buddying scheme between established and newly arrived children who are moving onto secondary education. A total of 450 children and young people will participate in these activities during the project.

### Young community leaders programme

The final component of the project, run by Chilypep, is a 15-week course for 45 young people from all backgrounds who attend Parkwood Academy or live within the catchment area. The programme aims to develop the confidence and self-esteem of these students, raise aspirations, and create a positive alternative space where they can have a sense of belonging and individual and collective power to achieve positive change for themselves, and influence their communities and the decisions that affect them. Young people are helped to explore and develop their understanding of the complexities of global, national and local political structures and decision making, and how these impact on the world as they and others experience it.

“The Young Community Leaders Programme will target newly arrived, BME<sup>12</sup> and white students, aiming to divert young people from extremism. The programme offers an alternative for young people to become empowered and feel that they have a place and a voice within their school and communities.”

Lesley Pollard, Managing Director at ChilyPep

## 5 Analysis of the RUBIC approach

This is a highly deprived community, with high unemployment, that has had to adapt to a large influx of new people. RUBIC seeks to tackle the different forces that threaten to undermine cohesion in this community.

Whilst students may receive positive messages about diversity in school, these can be challenged at home or in wider social circles. RUBIC creates a safe place where people can feel that their grievances are being listened to, and where they can explore these attitudes and re-examine them. In this community, such a forum is crucial, as it both helps to prevent parents from gravitating towards far-right groups, which can be the only place where they feel that their concerns are listened to, and because it helps to prevent the transmission of negative views to young people, thus undermining the cohesion efforts of the school.

Tackling attitudes in students' homes, as well as giving local people the opportunity to engage on a much deeper level in resolving community conflict through the community guardians scheme, has a much deeper impact than working with students alone. Parent-centred activities create the necessary atmosphere in children's homes to help make other aspects of RUBIC, such as the young leaders programme and schools workshops, a success.



RUBIC creates a  
**‘safe’**  
place where people  
can feel that their  
grievances are being  
listened to

## 6 RUBIC’s approach to partnership working and local community ownership

RUBIC brings many different partners together and because the creation of this partnership was organic.

It began with the identification of a problem and with an appreciation by both Parkwood Academy and Chilypep that they did not have the capacity to tackle these issues alone. Similar concerns were raised by Sheffield Cohesion Advisory Group (CAG).

Lesley Pollard from Chilypep feels that some of the key lessons to come out of this project already have been around the need to identify people who can work together because, “sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. She emphasises that partnerships must bring together the right organisations with the right skills. She explains that RUBIC is different partly because all partners played a role in making the project happen and that its starting point was to address a clear need, rather than coming together to fulfil the criteria of funders. Chilypep provides a solid foundation upon which the other partnership organisations can build equally strong local relationships under the RUBIC banner.

Parkwood Academy has taken a brave step to embrace this project, which is experimental and demands commitment and resources from their side. This reflects the outlook of the school, which regards itself as having a role to play in shaping the future of the whole community, not just of its students.

“Schools can’t manage this on their own. You have to see yourself as part of the community.”

**Paul Howard, Community Liaison Officer,  
Parkwood Academy**

## 7 Evaluation

RUBIC aims to create a replicable model that can be rolled out in other areas of high tension, particularly deprived areas with high numbers of new arrivals.

Forty-eight evaluation days are written into the project over three years. The evaluation methodology is highly participative and youth and community-led, employing tools such as participant diaries and use of outcomes stars – a tool through which young people can visually map the impact of activities on them. The evaluation also seeks to come up with radical methods to measure social impact, for example, by asking young people to come up with their own assessments of how much the outcomes of the project are worth to them and their community. This commitment to evaluation creates opportunities for knowledge transfer to others working in similar contexts in the UK.

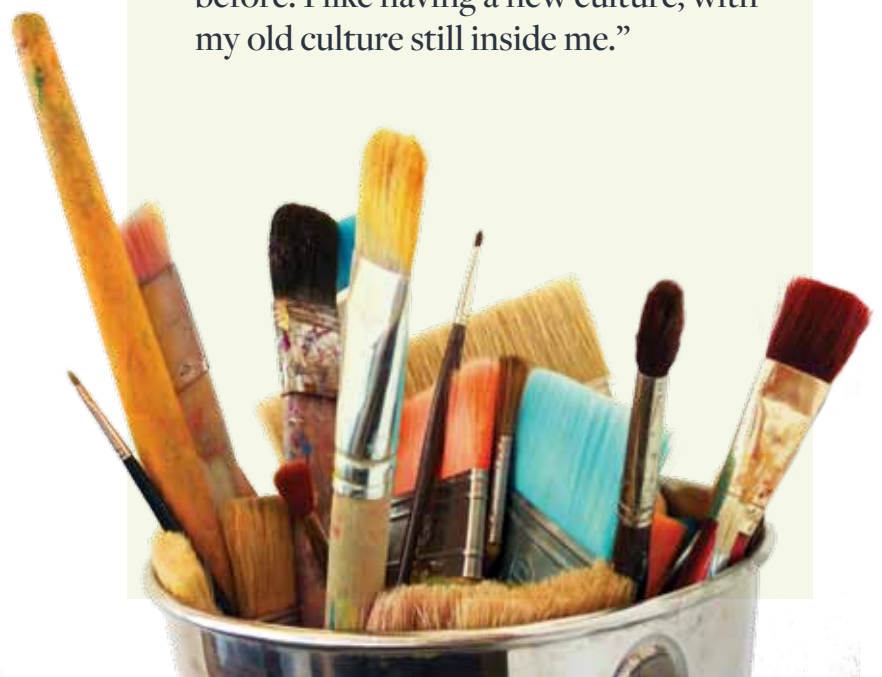
### ‘M’

M is a young man who arrived in Sheffield in 2016 from South Sudan as an asylum seeker. M joined the weekly support group run by Chilypep.

Through this group M has taken part in a range of creative arts activities, as well as consultations about what he needed when he arrived, to inform service providers.

He explains:

“When I come here [to the group], I am happy. I have made friends and we have come together. I have found the group very helpful, it has everything. I like to discuss English and learn more. I have learned about Sheffield and things that happen in Sheffield, and I have been places I have not been before. I like having a new culture, with my old culture still inside me.”





## 8 Conclusion

RUBIC takes an innovative approach to building cohesion in north Sheffield. Working together, five partners are addressing the forces that undermine integration by working collaboratively to employ complementary approaches.

Creating opportunities for local people to air their views and to meet and speak through expertly facilitated discussions helps create a conducive atmosphere for transforming attitudes amongst young people through activities in the school. Use of a Community Guardians programme, that gives local people the skills to actively resolve disputes is extremely empowering in a context where people may feel powerless to affect change in their community.

The project probably wouldn't have come about if it wasn't for the Sheffield Cohesion Advisory Group (CAG), and such a forum, where actors working in the field come together to support and share ideas, is of tremendous value. Chilypep's local links and long-standing commitment to the community maximises local credibility and provides a way-in for the other partners.

Expertly  
facilitated discussions  
help create a conducive  
atmosphere for  
**transforming**  
attitudes amongst  
young people

Without this local credibility a project like this would be impossible. The investment in evaluation, undertaken by an external evaluator working alongside the project team, effectively turns this project into a piece of action research, providing opportunities to inform future work in this community and elsewhere.

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# St Edmund’s Nursery School and Children’s Centre: Integrating Roma children from Central and Eastern Europe into early years education

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## Summary

St Edmund's is a nursery school and children's centre in Girlington, Bradford which is one of Britain's most deprived neighbourhoods. The school has an outstanding track record in engaging Roma children in early years education and in supporting the broader integration of Roma families.

- St Edmund's employs staff from Central, Eastern European and Roma backgrounds, drawing on talent and skills in the local community.
- The school employs a Roma Family Support Worker who serves as an advocate for the community, therefore building trust.
- St Edmund's operates an open-door policy, through which parents can join their children in the school for as long, and as often, as they wish, which promotes engagement.
- Regular and persistent home visits by Family Support Workers to all Roma families in the area encourages parents to visit the school and provides them with broader support.
- The school has a welcoming informal atmosphere, emphasising the use of first names, and a staffroom that is open to parents.
- All staff have an in-depth understanding of Roma parents' experiences of education and discrimination in their home countries.
- Staff employ innovative approaches to help Roma parents feel more comfortable about leaving their children.
- The school insists on a non-judgemental attitude towards parents, regardless of any challenges they may present to staff, always focussing on doing what is best for the child.
- St Edmund's provides multiple opportunities to engage parents in additional activities within the school, including parenting classes, ESOL classes, a Dad's club, and storytelling sessions, and seeks to adapt services to suit Roma families better.



## 1 Background

Girlington is among the 5 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in the country and sits within an area which has one of the highest rate of child poverty in the UK.

Girlington has a long history of immigration, and a majority non-white population, with the area traditionally serving as an entry point for newly arrived communities. Girlington is home to a new and growing Roma community from Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Within this Roma community are some of the most vulnerable families in both Bradford and the UK. These families are at high risk of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, and struggle with low levels of literacy and English language skills, poor engagement with public services, and high levels of poverty.

## 2 About St Edmund’s

Roma children are under-represented in early years’ provision, but St Edmund’s Nursery School and Children’s Centre has bucked the trend, with some 24 Roma children currently enrolled (representing 10 per cent of the total intake) and a growing number joining monthly.

Over the past three years the number of Roma parents accessing the free two-year early education entitlement has increased year on year. The school also has high levels of engagement among Roma parents in parenting and life skills education, a Dad’s club, ESOL classes and other activities that support children’s development and promote social integration. That St Edmund’s has such a high attendance of Roma children is not by chance or simply a reflection of local demographics. Over the past seven years the school has worked to develop new and innovative strategies and approaches to engage Roma families. This includes overcoming negative perceptions about early years education held by parents, and tackling high levels of fear and distrust. In welcoming Roma families into the school, St Edmund’s builds on a long history of working with newly arrived migrant families.

## 3 The St Edmund’s model

Central to St Edmund’s success in integrating Roma children has been the employment of staff from Roma and Eastern and Central European backgrounds.

In some cases, these staff speak the same languages as the Roma families. Out of 72 staff employed at St Edmund’s, five are from Eastern, Central and South Eastern European Backgrounds.

Among the staff team at St Edmund’s is a Family Support Worker from a Slovakian Roma background, called Juraj Tancos. Central to Juraj’s role, and that of the other Family Support Workers at St Edmund’s, is identifying Roma families in the area who have babies and young children, and regularly undertaking home visits to encourage these families to enrol their children. In liaising with these parents, Juraj has also taken on a role of supporting families with many of the wider challenges that they face, such as difficulties accessing benefits and health care, finding appropriate accommodation, and legal problems. Juraj has become a key liaison for the Roma community in Girlington and a bridge between the community and mainstream services. He has built up a high level of trust within the community and is regarded by many as their main advocate, which in turn has made them more willing to engage with St Edmund’s.





## 4 Building trust with parents

Many of the obstacles that need to be overcome in engaging Roma families in early years education relate to negative experiences in countries of origin. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, for example, Roma children often attend segregated schools.

The level of education and the resources in these schools are usually of a lower standard than those offered in mainstream education. Many Roma parents have their own difficult memories associated with attending these schools, where they were, for example, subject to beatings, neglect and other abuse.<sup>13</sup> This makes them highly suspicious of the education system in the UK. The discrimination Roma face in Central and Eastern Europe has also set people up with entrenched expectations of discrimination.

When these parents are first encouraged to attend St Edmund's with their children they are immediately suspicious about how their child will be treated. Parents have consistently expressed concerns to staff that their child will be neglected. Despite reassurance from staff, parents frequently remain reluctant to bring their child to St Edmund's. Concerns about their child's lack of English language skills is also a major obstacle.

### Open door policy

To address these concerns and overcome high levels of distrust, the St Edmund's 'open door policy' has been fundamental. Through this policy all parents are free to join their children in activities for as long, and as often, as they wish. This has helped to build trust and understanding about what the nursery and children's centre has to offer. In many cases, Roma parents have still been reluctant to leave their children. This led one creative teacher, to introduce a 'video diaries' approach. Parents can leave their children for short periods during which the teacher will record them. When parents watch the videos, they are often astounded to see their children interacting and playing happily with other children. The video diaries approach has become a useful tool in helping parents to adjust to leaving their children. Other techniques, such as Makaton, are used to help children who do not speak English to communicate.<sup>14</sup>



Despite the success of these approaches, it can still take a lot of time before parents will trust St Edmund's. An example was given by staff of a Roma child who fell and cut her lip whilst at nursery. When her grandmother came to pick her up she was furious and became very aggressive, accusing the teacher of neglecting the child because of her background. Staff visited the home to reassure the family and made sure on the following day to welcome the grandmother and child back into the nursery, and to make it clear they understood why she was upset. This deep understanding of family's experiences in home countries, coupled with consistency, and underpinned by a commitment to do whatever is best for the children, has been fundamental to rising enrolment figures.

The staffroom is open to all parents and various activities within the centre help to foster an inclusive atmosphere. Parents are free to come and go whenever they wish and are made to feel welcome. First names are always used between staff and parents. As a result, parents are encouraged to feel that St Edmund's is as much a place for them as it is for their children. Roma parents said that whenever they had a problem, regardless of whether it related to their child, they would come to St Edmund's or phone Juraj for advice. St Edmund's is clearly regarded as a safe place and the Roma parents' expectation is that they will always be listened to and treated equally and with respect by all staff.

Parents  
are free to come  
and go whenever they  
wish and are made to  
**feel welcome**  
First names are always  
used between staff  
and parents



## 5 Adapting existing services

Staff now offer their “Life Programme”, a parenting workshop which ordinarily takes place over one day, across several short sessions over six weeks, making it more appealing to Roma mothers.

Around 10 mothers attended the first Life Programme, some of whom spoke about how much they had enjoyed it, and how useful it had been in helping them with issues such as discipline and dealing with their child’s difficult behaviour. This has also served to give parents a place they can meet in a mutually supportive atmosphere and feel accepted. St Edmund’s therefore, not only provides Roma families with a positive experience of early years education, but also helps to overcome suspicion of mainstream services more generally.

Staff at St Edmund’s spoke passionately about time spent building trust with Roma families and about the importance of non-judgemental attitudes. A great deal of time and energy is spent on visiting these families in their own homes.

St Edmund’s  
is also engaged in  
many wider community  
activities to  
**promote**  
cohesion and  
integration



“A lot of these families are really lost in the system, and feel really let down... we’ve got to adapt to how they live and see it from their point of view and stop being so judgmental.”

**Vicky Ullah, Family Support Worker at St Edmund’s**

A central fear raised by the Roma parents was of their children being taken away from them. This was based on both first-hand experiences of contact with children’s services and rumours they had heard of Roma children being taken into care. This was enough for many families in the area to avoid engaging with mainstream services wherever possible. Staff at St Edmund’s explained that a lot of their work is about helping parents to understand that these services are there to help them, and teaching them to interact with services better. Juraj explained that consistent contact with families also meant that St Edmund’s is often the first agency to become aware of crisis situations.

An example was given of a young Roma mother of 18 who was being pressured into a sexual relationship with her landlord because she was behind with her rent. Staff at St Edmund’s were able to intervene.

“After some time, they really appreciate you... that’s really important for the community, that they feel that people are doing this because they care about them and their children. That’s what comes across here, everyone just cares about their children.”

**Juraj Tancos, Family Support Worker at St Edmund’s**

## Dalibor

Dalibor comes from a Slovakian Roma background and is one of seven children. He attended St Edmund’s between 2014 and 2015. Initially his attendance was low. Dalibor’s mum was very fearful about leaving him, telling staff that she was worried that he might not be safe, and that staff might not look after him.

The St Edmund’s Slovakian Roma practitioner spent time with the family, showing them that he understood their concerns. The Keyperson and other staff from the classroom were very patient and made the family feel welcome and relaxed and paid special attention to Dalibor’s baby brother, Augustin. Parents were invited to extra activities, such as Sharing Stories workshops, music sessions and open days. The important thing was not just to invite them but to ensure that they felt valued, and for staff to express how happy they were to see them and to show that they wanted to get to know them and their children better. Dalibor showed great talent in gymnastics. Staff took many photos and videos of his acrobatics and proudly shared them with his mum. She was happy, not just to see how well he was doing, but also how happy and proud the staff were of his achievements.

Makaton signs were used to visually support Dalibor’s English learning. Staff learnt a few phrases in Slovakian to communicate with Dalibor better and his father enrolled in ESOL classes at St Edmund’s.

At the end of his time at St Edmund’s, his mother’s confidence and trust had increased dramatically. Dalibor’s younger brother Augustin began attending St Edmund’s 2-3s provision and has just moved into the 3-4s class. His attendance has been excellent from the beginning and, when asked how she feels about this child starting, his mother said that she is ‘very happy that Augustin is at St Edmund’s’ and ‘believes and trusts that he will be well looked after.’



## 6 Impact

As trust has built between St Edmund’s and the community, it has become easier to enrol more Roma children.

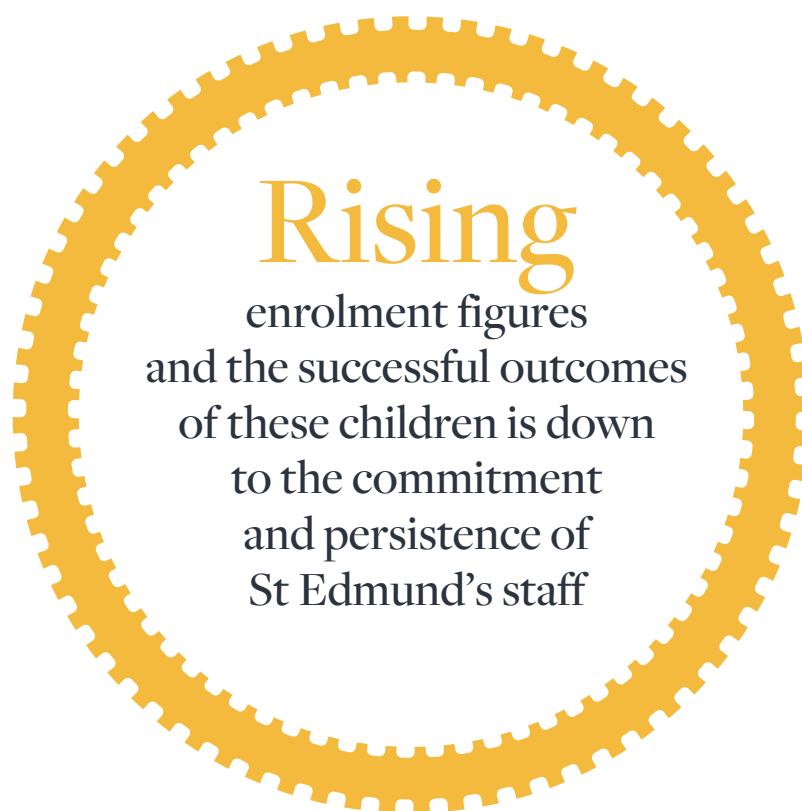
Parents are now some of St Edmund’s greatest advocates, suggesting that the initial investment and persistence by staff in building trust and understanding will result in much less work in this area in the future. Underpinning St Edmund’s ethos is the importance of listening to the community and staff willingness to engage those who are hardest to reach, particularly those on the fringes of society.

St Edmund’s is also engaged in many wider community activities to promote cohesion and integration. For example, St Edmund’s was involved in organising a large street party in June 2017, bringing the whole community together and engaging parents at the school. They also run Our Community, Our World activities, which are regular events that celebrate local diversity. The school has been awarded status as a Centre of Excellence for New Families in Bradford, and is engaged in various knowledge and best practice sharing activities regionally. Ofsted have consistently awarded the school outstanding status, commending their work with new communities.

## 7 Conclusion

Internal school data on 2017 nursery leavers shows that many Roma children enter nursery at St Edmund’s with attainment well below that expected for their age.

All Roma children make at least expected progress, with some making accelerated progress, which means the attainment gap is closing. Attendance is a significant factor. Rising enrolment figures and the successful outcomes of these children is down to the commitment and persistence of St Edmund’s staff. The team has gone to great lengths to listen to these families and to understand their backgrounds, including visiting schools in one of the home countries. Employing staff who speak the children’s first language and a dedicated Roma Family Support Worker has forged a strong connection between St Edmund’s and the Roma community in Gillington. The Family Support Worker has taken on an advocacy role, serving as a bridge between the community, St Edmund’s and other services, and this has been fundamental in building trust. The welcoming and non-judgemental attitude of staff and their commitment to understanding these family’s needs and to adapting their services have clearly had a positive impact on levels of attendance and attainment for Roma children.



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# Xenia: Two-way social integration for women through English language learning

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A decorative graphic consisting of numerous gears of various sizes and orientations, some with arrows indicating rotation. The gears are rendered in a light orange color and are scattered across the right side of the page, creating a sense of movement and interconnectedness.

## Summary

Xenia brings migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and British women together in Hackney, London to build English language skills and create connections across perceived divides of language, culture, ethnicity, race, age and identity.

- Xenia is a series of weekly drop-in workshops, founded at the Hackney Museum, a place that celebrates the lives of local people, therefore creating an ideal setting for women to share their stories. Xenia also offers bi-weekly sessions and social activities with other local community partners.
- The informal crèche facility makes workshops accessible for women with young children.
- Workshops are facilitated by both qualified language teachers and those with no formal teaching experience, all are volunteers.
- Each workshop has a theme around which discussions are structured, and includes plenty of work in small groups to build learners' confidence.
- The facilitators create a safe space where women feel comfortable talking about their experiences, thus building empathy and connections between women from different backgrounds.
- Xenia works in partnership with ESOL providers and other statutory and voluntary sector organisations in the borough to reach women and promote joined up approaches. Xenia is not a replacement for conventional ESOL classes, but provides vital language practise with fluent English speakers and promotes two-way integration.
- Migrant women who regularly attend Xenia feel more confident speaking English, have improved language skills, and use English more in their daily lives. Xenia creates a strong sense of community and reduces isolation amongst both migrant and British women.



## 1 Background

The need for more English language learning provisions for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the UK is evident.

Barriers to learning English, for migrant women in particular, have been highlighted by Refugee Action and the Wonder Foundation, with a lack of child care facilities, isolation and poverty cited as major obstacles.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst there is a clear need to increase formal ESOL provision, community-based English groups, like the one described in this case study, can play a highly complementary role by improving learners' speaking skills and confidence and strengthening social ties in communities.

## 2 About Xenia

Xenia is a group for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and British women that meets fortnightly at the Hackney Museum on Saturday mornings, as well as on alternate Saturdays at other community partner venues.

Xenia was started by a young British woman, Theodora Cadbury, who through working in the voluntary sector, became aware of a lack of appropriate English provisions for migrant women in London. She observed that many migrant women look after young children in the day, making it difficult for them to access English classes, and that work commitments also prevent them from attending due to unpredictable schedules. Some women would not attend mixed-sex ESOL sessions and many migrant women felt isolated, with few social ties beyond their own monolingual communities. These issues affect both newly arrived migrants and women who have lived in the UK for some time.

Theodora decided to host a one-off workshop at the Hackney Museum as part of *AntiUniversity Now*<sup>16</sup> in 2016, bringing fluent English-speaking women and migrant women learners together to speak English in an informal environment and to make friends. She brought in several other young women to support running the workshop, and it was such a success that more were scheduled. Xenia evolved into a regular group at the museum and the team grew. Over time, Xenia's organisers, some of whom have no background in teaching English, have developed and evolved highly effective approaches to promoting English language learning, and to creating connections between women from different backgrounds.

## 3 The Xenia Workshops

About twenty women attend each three-hour workshop. These women are a mix of native English speakers, migrant women who are fluent in English, and migrant women who are learning English.

The workshops operate on an entirely drop-in basis. This means that women can attend as regularly as they wish, with no expectation that they will come to every workshop. This is important to the participants, many of whom have hectic lives, and the organisers emphasise that Xenia is a place where women are welcome without judgement, regardless of how often they attend. An informal crèche facility is provided for children, with older female children encouraged to join the workshops.

Each three-hour workshop is led by one or more female volunteer facilitators. A total of eight women are on Xenia's organising team. Of these, two have formal language teaching qualifications. Those with more experience support other volunteers to facilitate workshops, however several of the organisers simply take part as English speakers. Migrant women attending Xenia have different levels of English language skills. To address this, each workshop begins with a reminder to the fluent English speakers to speak slowly, to use gestures, and to be patient – allowing everybody to express themselves. Small individual whiteboards and pens are given to women so that they can draw or write to help themselves be understood.





A common sentiment expressed by these women was that **Xenia is like a community**, and that this **feeling of community** is not something they often otherwise experience

Each workshop has a theme. One workshop observed during research for this case study was “London”. In this workshop, women began by going around the circle to introduce themselves, the women were then organised into small groups to talk about one thing they liked about where they lived and one thing they didn’t like. Although the scope of this topic may seem limited, in practice, once the women began talking, the discussions become animated and involved. Further activities followed, sharing knowledge and experiences of London. Another example of a Xenia workshop observed was “Maps”. In one of the exercises in this workshop, women marked on a map of the world all the places they have visited, which led to many conversations about the journeys women had taken, countries and cities visited, and the characteristics of different places in the world. Women talked about why they had made these trips and learnt more about each other’s lives. In some cases, women from different backgrounds found that they had visited the same countries or had similar experiences.

What all the workshops have in common is that they create very organic opportunities for women to interact, learn more about each other, and connect. As the women who organise Xenia are keen to point out, and what is evident from observing the workshops, is that Xenia is not about British women helping migrant women. Rather, Xenia brings women together from different backgrounds that would otherwise rarely meet so that they can get to know each other. Migrant and non-migrant women alike reported that the workshops enabled them to learn more about different cultures and values and about different women’s lives in London.





## 4 Xenia's impact

Xenia has a tangible impact on reducing isolation amongst migrant women and increases these women's independence. The migrant women attending Xenia explained that the workshops were opportunities to socialise, get to know new people and to make friends.

A common sentiment expressed by these women was that Xenia is like a community, and that this feeling of community is not something they often otherwise experience. One migrant woman from a conservative Muslim background explained that women in her community tend to rely on their husbands and fathers, which can be isolating, whereas at Xenia she feels free to express herself and can learn about other women's experiences and backgrounds. She said that if she was to attend Xenia with a man from her family, he would probably try to speak for her, however with no man present, she can speak for herself.

The fact that Xenia is a women-only group is central to its success. Aside from some women attending because cultural norms make it difficult for them to join mixed-sex groups, for all women present, the absence of men gives them greater freedom. Both migrant and non-migrant women agreed that they would not feel comfortable taking about the issues they discuss at Xenia in front of men. It was widely felt by the women that the presence of men would inhibit them from expressing themselves. Xenia gives women the freedom to talk about issues that are important to them.

The fact that  
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“Speaking in front of men would make me fearful.”

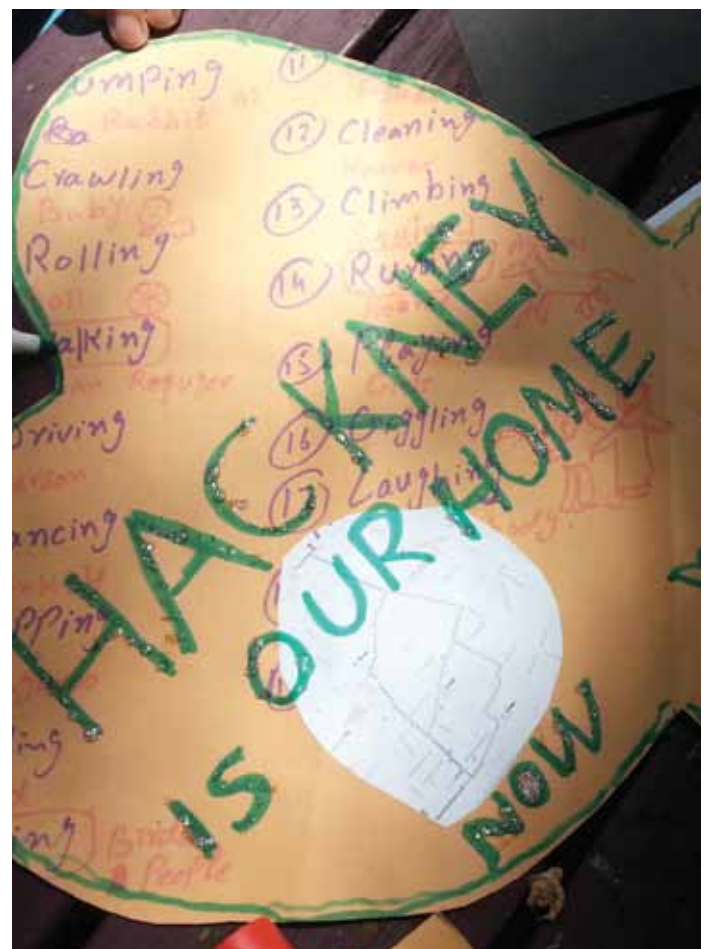
### Migrant woman attending Xenia

The women described Xenia as “a place that is special for us [women]”, a place that “embraces women”, that is “empowering”, “safe” and “protected”, and where women feel “valued”, “listened to” and “understood”. For some migrant women, Xenia also provides important respite from caring duties in their families and from the stresses and strains of daily life.

In researching this case study, nine migrant women at Xenia, between the ages of 20 and 65, were surveyed about Xenia's impact on their English language abilities and confidence. All nine women reported that attending Xenia helped them to feel more confident speaking English. Eight out of nine women agreed that Xenia had helped them to learn and understand new English vocabulary and to understand spoken English better, including different accents.

The survey results showed a correlation between the number of Xenia workshops a woman had attended, and the amount of time she spent speaking English outside the workshops. All women who had attended five or more Xenia sessions agreed, or strongly agreed, with the statement:

“Since coming to Xenia I have spoken English more in my everyday life.”



In contrast, women who had attended between three and five sessions weren't sure, and one woman, who had attended fewer than three sessions, disagreed with this statement. This suggests that attending Xenia over time helps migrant women speak English more in their daily lives thus promoting integration. All learners surveyed said that they would recommend Xenia to other women learning English.

Xenia's positive impact on British women is important. Xenia teaches British women about the lives of migrant women, their cultures and religions, and about their experiences of leaving their countries of origin and integrating into the UK. The workshops build empathy and understanding between women, and allow women from different backgrounds to integrate. This in turn helps migrant women attending Xenia to feel more welcomed, accepted and part of a wider community. It is likely that the acceptance they experience from British women at Xenia has a wider effect on how they relate to, and feel about, British women outside of Xenia.

## 5 Xenia's operational model

The young women who founded Xenia, initially as an experiment, were unaware that it would be so successful or that it would grow so quickly. The success has been such that they have introduced additional workshops each month, along with social events, and are growing their team.

This is likely to include employing a paid coordinator as this model is largely unsustainable without some level of paid staffing. Xenia's growth has created more opportunities to signpost migrant women to services, and building partnerships with ESOL providers and other provision targeted at migrant women. The team is constantly adapting and strengthening the model according to identified needs, including enhancing the capacity of British women who attend Xenia to support the language development of migrant women. To date, Xenia has operated with no funding other than nominal amounts raised through independently organised events and individuals contributing towards the cost of refreshments and workshop materials. Xenia recognise that seeking funding is an inevitable part of ensuring that Xenia can be sustained, expanded and replicated.



The migrant women from Xenia who took part in this research were quick to point out that the dedication, commitment and values of the young women who lead Xenia are what helps to make it a success. Migrant women commented on how hard the volunteers work and how well prepared the workshops are. Several learners spoke about how Xenia volunteers had phoned or texted them to follow up and see if they were OK. This commitment had made a positive impression on the women and they felt cared for and were impressed by the volunteers.

The Xenia team are surprised that, as women in their twenties, they have succeeded in growing such a successful group comprised of women of all ages. They believe that this reflects the level of openness amongst all women who have engaged with Xenia and their genuine interest in learning about migrants' lives, as well as a lack of other opportunities to personally engage with these women in other circumstances. The intergenerational aspect of the project, participating in a mutual exchange, is a unique and inviting element of this work.



The commitment  
of the volunteers had made  
**a positive  
impression**  
on the women and they  
felt cared for



## Aysha, aged 23

“I came to London in December 2016 from Sri Lanka to marry my husband. When I first arrived, my loneliness was ten out of ten. I was very upset and missed my family and wanted to go back. I have a good relationship with my mother-in-law, but I cannot speak to her about close things.

I wanted to work, so I started ESOL classes. In ESOL they improve our writing, reading, listening and speaking but we only have two hours. I speak to my community in my language, so I don't have much opportunity to speak English.

My ESOL teacher told me about Xenia in March 2017, and now both ESOL and Xenia are very important in my life. Xenia has helped me lots with my English speaking and listening and we have time to have real conversations. I am used to people laughing when I make a mistake, but the women at Xenia are so kind and helpful, they correct me, and I feel more confident. I am learning from women at Xenia about how to speak to, and help, other people. I am learning a ‘sharing culture’ from women at Xenia. I tell friends back home about this culture and it makes me feel welcome in London. It is so nice to hear other women's stories.

Some people in London are scared of how I dress. It makes me sad and sometimes I am scared to go out because, when they see me wearing the full-face veil, they see me as separate. At Xenia, women don't make me feel this way, they make me feel welcome. They always respect my boundaries and ask permission. Xenia also introduced me to a course for unemployed women, where they gave me the idea to start my own business. At Xenia they are giving me other opportunities, not just language. Now when I apply for jobs, I put two women from Xenia as referees.

Before Xenia I did not go anywhere by myself, but the women at Xenia made me feel safer. Now I am happy to live in London.”

## 6 Conclusion

Xenia has grown out of the dedicated efforts of a group of young women who wanted to personally connect with migrant women in London, and share stories, while taking part in a genuine exchange of language and cross-cultural learning.

The young women leading Xenia have become custodians of a tremendous amount of knowledge, resources and insight into what it takes to facilitate a successful intercultural, inter-generational group for migrant women that promotes language learning and two-way social integration.

The scope for transferable lessons for others wanting to establish similar groups lies in some of the key ingredients that have made it a success. These include the fact that it is a women-only group with a non-hierarchical atmosphere (nobody is there just to help, everybody is there to learn).



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# Refuweegee: Celebrating Glasgow together

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# 5



## Summary

Refuweegee is a campaign that promotes two-way integration in Glasgow through volunteer-led social action that welcomes new arrivals and embraces them as part of the city.

- Refuweegee removes the barriers and discomfort that people in Glasgow may otherwise face in helping asylum seekers and refugees.
- The organisation’s success is rooted in their effective use of social media, through which they mobilise people en masse.
- Refuweegee’s creative branding appeals to people through Glasgow’s sense of connectedness – both to each other and to the city.
- Refuweegee has created an alternative positive narrative about refugees, rooted in what people have in common, rather than what sets them apart.
- The project has built exceptionally strong and effective partnerships, working across the public, private and voluntary sector to mobilise resources.
- The organisation is run by a small, dedicated team, who are appreciated across the city for their energy, dynamism, drive and creativity.
- Refuweegee sticks to a light ‘campaign-like’ structure, making it responsive to need, with no heavy bureaucracy slowing it down.
- The initiative is incredibly low cost and rooted in a DIY, citizen-led approach.

### Scotland

has taken the largest number of Syrian refugees arriving in the UK



## 1 Background

Scotland has taken the largest number of Syrian refugees arriving in the UK through the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (VPR), and Glasgow, where this initiative takes place, is the largest dispersal site for asylum seekers.

The city has a long history of welcoming asylum seekers and refugees. According to Home Office data, as of the end of 2016, Glasgow had the largest asylum-seeking community in the UK, with one asylum seeker for every 200 residents. Glasgow also enjoys a reputation for being one of the friendliest cities in the UK and the world.<sup>17</sup>

## 2 About Refuweegee

Refuweegee began in October 2015 when Selina Hales, a Glasgow resident, was looking for a way to respond to the migrant crisis.

She recognised that she was like many people in the UK who wanted to help, but didn't know how. Selina came up with the very simple idea of creating 'welcome packs' for newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow.

Each welcome pack comprises three things: something useful (often toiletries or a hat and scarf); something Scottish (Tunnock's Tea Cakes are a favourite); and something personal. The personal item is a letter or postcard written by a Glaswegian, which welcomes the new person to the city. In addition, each welcome pack includes a stamped addressed envelope to enable recipients to send a thank you letter, share their stories and even request further support. The packs are tailored to women, men and children, including teenagers. Reflecting on why Selina started this project, she says, "I wanted to give people the warm Glaswegian welcome that I received when I arrived here 15 years ago." The name Refuweegee comes from the term 'Weegie', meaning a Glaswegian. People say in Glasgow, "we're all Weegies here," and Selina wanted to extend this Glaswegian camaraderie to members of newly arrived communities.

## 3 Refuweegee Activities

Once Refuweegee was launched, the welcome packs took off at such a pace that within a few months Selina was inundated with donations and letters from people across the city.

She also began receiving donations for events, such as tickets for concerts, which prompted her to begin organising social activities. The first event organised was a trip to see the eccentric Glaswegian musical collective Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5. Fourteen asylum seekers and refugees from Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, Iran and Iraq, came along, and the gig provided them with a warm, if slightly unconventional, Glaswegian welcome. From here Refuweegee began organising regular trips to concerts, festivals and parties, as well as hosting their own events. These are the sorts of activities that refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the city would ordinarily have little access to, and they provide access to Glasgow's vibrant social scene and to making new friends and joining local social networks. Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into Glasgow's mainstream social scene has a 'normalising' effect, and effectively promotes integration.

Refuweegee now host at least one small event of their own each month, and larger events several times a year. These include: 'Refuweegee Raconteurs', a monthly ceilidh-style event with storytelling, and 'Random Acts of Kindness', an open mic night blending music, spoken word, and dance "from old and new Scots". Their 'Good Food, Good Mood Barbeque' attracts over 800 people each summer, with all food donated by local suppliers and restaurants. Refuweegee also organise trips out of the city, for example to Loch Lomond. All events are free for refugees and asylum seekers and bring people living in Glasgow from all backgrounds together, to meet one another and have fun. These activities help reduce the isolation commonly experienced by members of newly arrived communities.



Thanks to excellent partnerships developed with local agencies and services, every asylum seeker arriving in Glasgow now receives a welcome pack from Refuweegee, alongside other donations. Partner organisations interviewed expressed huge appreciation of Refuweegee’s work, stating that the organisation fills crucial gaps in services, by providing items such as pushchairs, mobile phones, clothing, household items and food. The welcome packs fulfil a deeper purpose, as explained by Priscille Mulhearn, from the organisation Migrant Help, who distributes packs to new arrivals:

“People are really happy to get the packs. It’s not just the pack itself, it’s the gesture. They may already have the idea that they are not welcome. But when they receive the welcome pack it is very moving for them. It makes them feel very happy.”

**Priscille Mulhearn, Community Liaison Coordinator at Migrant Help**

An example reply from a welcome pack recipient reads:

“I am speechlessly heartened by such a rare and unexpected act of love and humanity in my moments of despair. I am forever indebted.”

Refuweegee has also begun running weekly drop-ins so that refugees and asylum seekers can visit their premises and choose their own clothing, household and other items. The variety and volume of donations is growing all the time. Refuweegee’s success in procuring donations has been such that they have recently moved to larger premises, so that they have enough room to store items. Duncan Campsie, Head of the Refugee Support Team at Glasgow City Council, compares a trip to Refuweegee to a visit to “Aladdin’s cave”, emphasizing that whenever services in Glasgow, including the council, have an urgent need, they contact Refuweegee.

“Refuweegee is helping people who are falling through the gaps of the asylum system, including those who are destitute, who are not accessing statutory services.”

**Duncan Campsie, Head of the Refugee Support Team at Glasgow City Council**

## 4 What makes Refuweegee’s approach a success?

### Social media and branding

Central to Refuweegee’s success is their effective use of social media and of creative and appealing branding. This has enabled the organisation to reach thousands of people in Glasgow and to create a platform that removes the barriers people may otherwise face to helping refugees and asylum seekers. Refuweegee operates in a similar way to a social movement, empowering large numbers of citizens to engage in social action, using social media to convey a powerful message and inspire people to action. The organisation has over 13,000 followers on social media and uses lively, colourful and attractive flyers and posters to draw people to their activities and events. To create appealing promotional material, the organisation draws on the talents of local people with skills in graphic design, film and music, who volunteer their services.

### Partnerships

In under two years Refuweegee has created partnerships with over 20 local and national organisations and services. Glasgow City Council now shares details of all new families and individuals arriving through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme with Refuweegee in order that tailored welcome packs can be placed in people’s accommodation prior to their arrival. When arrival numbers are high, Refuweegee takes welcome packs to the airport with Glasgow City Council staff and Arabic speaking volunteers to welcome people and give children toys and crafts to play with whilst they wait.

“The sort of stuff that Refuweegee does would be very difficult for us to deliver. Whilst we can provide the basics, what Refuweegee provides them with is quite beautiful. It makes a huge difference to people. What they do is unique.”

**Duncan Campsie, Head of the Refugee Support Team at Glasgow City Council**



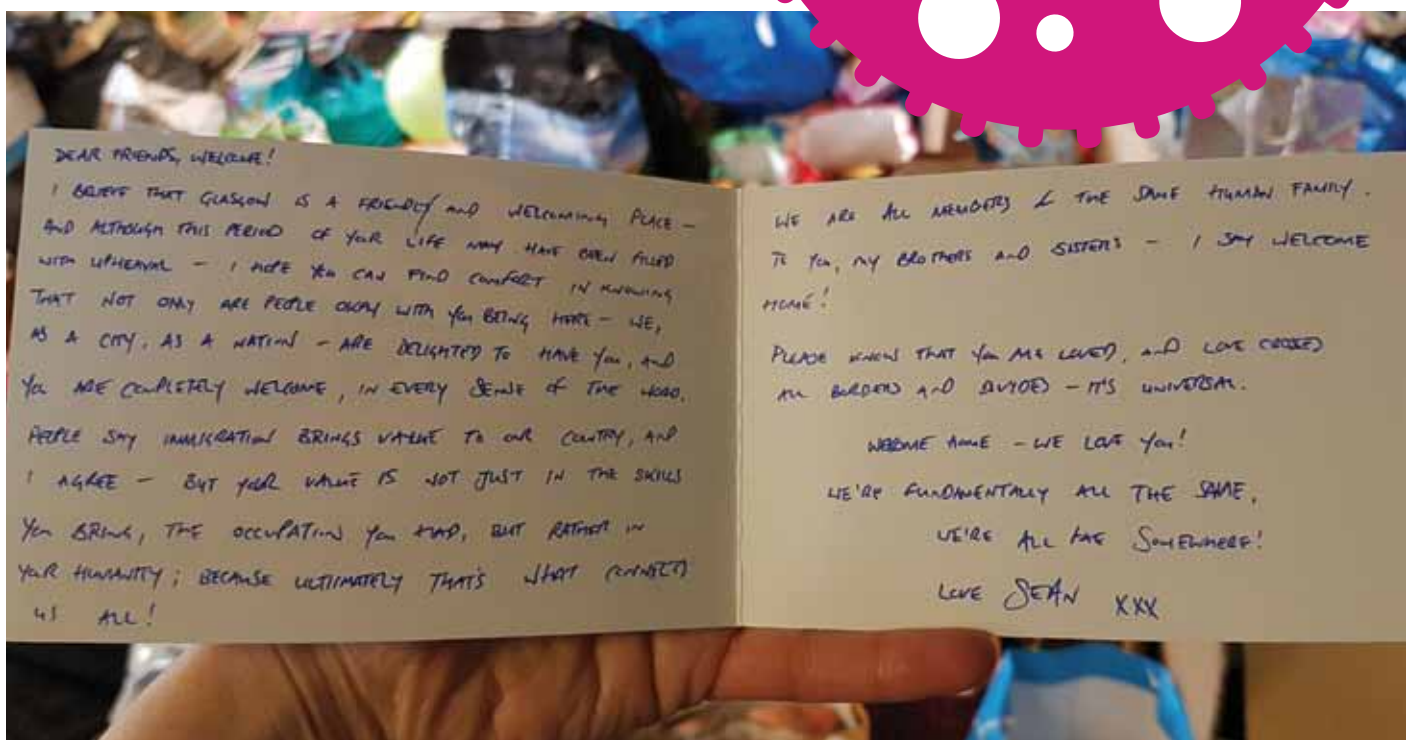
Through their partnership with Migrant Help, around 80 welcome packs are distributed each month. Oxfam Scotland gathers letters from locals in all their shops in Glasgow and this scheme will soon be extended across Scotland. The Scottish Refugee Council, Integration Networks, NHS Asylum Health, and Scottish Detainee Visitors all refer people to Refuweegee's weekly drop-ins, as well as contacting them with specific requests for welcome packs and donations. Numerous businesses in the city, including Social Bite, Harvest Co-op and Penny Black Glasgow, provide space in their premises for people to drop off donations. Not only do these partnerships help facilitate Refuweegee's activities, they also make it easier for local people to help refugees and asylum seekers and set the tone that this is a movement that has been adopted city-wide.

## Volunteers

Volunteers are crucial to Refuweegee's operations and the organisation has around 200 active volunteers in their database, alongside a dedicated volunteers page on Facebook, through which they can attract additional support. Volunteers fulfil important roles in the organisation including: collecting and sorting welcome packs and donations; staffing weekly drop-ins; designing posters and flyers; project planning and organising events; updating social media accounts; and administration. Volunteers are also encouraged to share and create new projects wherever there is capacity. Refuweegee has also engaged businesses and the local branches of large corporations in their work, with staff from Irwin Mitchell, DWP, Jacobs, Apple and Lloyds TSB regularly volunteering to support Refuweegee's activities, as well as providing pro-bono consultancy. Refugees who have been supported by Refuweegee, often go on to become volunteers themselves. For example, Syrians refugees who arrived in 2016 and received welcome packs are now helping to put together and distribute packs for current new arrivals from Syria.

## Reclaiming narratives

Through their appealing branding, Refuweegee has introduced a new word and concept into the language and culture of the city. A 'Refuweegee' is defined as "a person who upon arrival in Glasgow is embraced by the people of the city, a person considered to be a local," and the organisation uses an image of a dictionary definition as their logo, alongside the words "We're all fae somewhere," which serves as their tag line. Refuweegee has drawn upon Glasgow's existing welcoming atmosphere and friendly people, its status as a City of Sanctuary, and its long history of welcoming migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from around the world, to create a new, stronger, and more united positive narrative about refugees. Through their work they make it more difficult to propagate negative rhetoric about refugees, by making it something that is at odds with the culture of the city.



## 5 Refuweegee’s operational model (staffing and funding)

The ethos of the organisation has always been that it shouldn’t take money to deliver their work and long-term sustainability is inherent to their mission.

In the first year, Refuweegee was funded solely by donations and crowdfunding. As the organisation has grown, it has become necessary to fundraise for some modest grants to help cover staffing and development costs. In 2016/17, the organisation received just under £30,000 from trusts and foundations, alongside support from local businesses. Refuweegee is currently led by a core team of three supported by the more than 200 volunteers.

In 2016/17,  
the organisation  
received just under  
**£30,000**  
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## 6 Upscaling Refuweegee and the wider ramifications of their work

Refuweegee continues to grow in scale and scope and local authorities in Scotland have begun exploring the possibility of replicating the model elsewhere.

Duncan Campsie from Glasgow City Council has been supporting this process and sharing lessons from Refuweegee with other local authorities in Scotland, who instantly recognised the value and need for this approach. As a result, Refuweegee has developed a partnership with South Lanarkshire Council to roll out a ‘Refuweegee’ in their area, with the goal that the local community will adopt and run the initiative independently, following initial support. This endeavour will no doubt provide fascinating lessons for others in the UK and further afield wishing to adopt similar approaches. Refuweegee is also working with Dundee University to catalogue and analyse the welcome pack letters; as well with Oxfam Scotland’s policy team to capture case studies and the experiences of beneficiaries. Selina, the founder and Director, believes that anybody could adopt the Refuweegee model and roll it out in their area.



## Yaman, aged 22

“I arrived in Glasgow from Syria in December 2015. I was 19 years old. To be honest, at first it was very difficult for me. I didn’t know anybody here. I had no relatives or friends. For the first two or three months I was very lonely and didn’t trust people.

After some time, I went out more and I focused on my English. I met people through the mosque and at ESOL classes. This is how I found out that Refuweegee was taking people to a gig at the Barrowlands to see Colonel Mustard and the Dijon Five. I had never been to a gig, but I decided to go. The gig was really loud and crowded, but I had fun. I met lots of new people. The evening was also special, because it was my birthday! After this, Selina invited me to volunteer at Refuweegee and I started getting involved in anything that needed doing, like sorting the storage area, helping at events and translating.

Refuweegee has helped me a lot. It has helped me with my English and to understand people in Glasgow and life in Scotland. I was very young when I arrived, and I didn’t understand anything about things like tax or what the council does. But honestly, I think the biggest way that Refuweegee has helped me is psychologically – by changing my way of thinking. When I first arrived, I was very negative and critical. Selina helped me to become more positive and cheerful. I really admire the way Selina thinks, how she interacts with people and how strong she is. I’ve learnt a lot from her. She only speaks positively, and because of this, she has helped me to become more positive.

Refuweegee is so important. When people first arrive, they are afraid. They are scared that they might not be accepted, that people won’t like them. The welcome they receive from Refuweegee eases the pressure and the stress. The letter from the locals is great. You get this message telling you something about Glasgow and it makes such a good first impression. You feel like ‘wow, this person who I’ve never met is welcoming me to the city!’

I like living in Glasgow, it’s a simple city, people smile a lot and are straightforward – in this way it reminds of the place I come from in Syria. Thanks to Refuweegee I got my first job and now I am working as a translator. I am so grateful for all the ways that they have supported me.”



## 7 Conclusion

Refuweegee provides a fresh and dynamic approach to reducing the social isolation faced by refugees and asylum seekers and to promoting two-way social integration.

The initiative welcomes new arrivals, making them feel that people in Glasgow care about them, whilst sensitising local people to the plight of asylum seekers and refugees and encouraging a human response. It brings people together around what they have in common (Glasgow) and forges connections. The founder’s energy, passion and drive, along with her outgoing personality, have played a role in making Refuweegee a success.

“Wherever you go in Glasgow, for example, to events offering services for migrants, people are talking about Refuweegee. People feel very positively about them.”

**Priscille Mulhearn, Community Liaison Coordinator at Migrant Help**

Transferable lessons from this case study are not only around how similar methods and approaches can be adopted by others, such as through similar use of social media, welcome packs and events, but also around how to successfully reframe narratives around who refugees are, by creating new shared identities forged on a common connectedness to place.

To find out more visit [www.refuweegee.co.uk](http://www.refuweegee.co.uk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Refuweegee](https://www.facebook.com/Refuweegee) Twitter: [www.twitter.com/@refuweegee](https://www.twitter.com/@refuweegee)

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# Aik Saath: Promoting social integration through youth-led heritage and oral history projects

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## Summary

Aik Saath is a youth-led charity that has been actively promoting community cohesion and empowering young people in Slough for twenty years. Aik Saath's work has been the foundation upon which much of the town's cohesion efforts have been built. One aspect of the charity's work is its youth-led heritage projects that create opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to understand each other better, and to adopt alternative narratives around place and belonging.

- Aik Saath empowers young volunteers aged 11-19 to build cohesion in their communities, working with 40-70 active volunteers at any one time.
- Aik Saath's heritage projects bring people together to learn about each other's cultures.
- These heritage projects instil pride in communities and help people from marginalised groups feel more confident in their own skin, and more welcome.
- These projects enable people of all ages to think critically about ethnic, cultural and racial identity and about community and belonging, and to explore these themes together.
- Aik Saath is strongly rooted in Slough and this consistency and commitment to the town gives the charity local credibility and leverage.
- Aik Saath has a sophisticated understanding of diversity, identity and belonging and of the impact of different approaches on promoting cohesion.



## 1 Background

Slough is one of England and Wales’ most ethnically diverse towns with one of the highest levels of immigration. Slough has the lowest proportion of white English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish residents outside of London (35 per cent) and the highest proportion of foreign-born residents in south east England.

The borough also has a younger than average population, with more people under the age of 40 than any of the other south east local authorities. Whilst Slough is not considered a deprived town, neighbourhoods such as Chalvey and Britwell are within the 10-20 per cent most deprived in England and Wales. Slough is often celebrated for its diversity, tolerance and success in fostering cohesion and integration. But it has also served as a battleground between ethnic gangs, and in the last 10 years has struggled at times to digest high numbers of incoming migrants. Maintaining harmony amongst the town’s diverse communities, and ensuring that residents from all backgrounds have equal access to opportunities, is an ongoing focus and priority for the town.

## 2 About Aik Saath

Aik Saath (which means ‘Together As One’ in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu) is a charity, founded in 1998 by 15 young people who wanted to end gang violence between Asian youth in Slough.

Aik Saath’s mission is to work with people from all communities, faiths and backgrounds to promote and encourage peace, human rights and community cohesion through peer-led education. Aik Saath has been celebrated in Slough and further afield for the success it has had in strengthening community cohesion and empowering young people. The charity has won numerous awards, including the Philip Lawrence Award and the Diana Award, and has been praised by police for helping to prevent violent clashes during periods of high tension.

The day-to-day running of the charity is undertaken by a team of four, all of whom are under the age of 25, overseen by Director, Rob Deeks. Aside from the administrative and managerial tasks, most other activities are delivered by young people between the ages of 11 and 19, through Aik Saath’s model of engaging Young Volunteers. Forty regular volunteers work with Aik Saath (rising to 70 during the summer months), meeting weekly to plan and deliver peer-led education projects and learn new skills. Some of the charity’s existing youth activities include “Youth Cafés” (regular evening youth clubs spread across diverse areas of the town) and “Empoword”, a youth-led spoken word event. Primary and secondary schools in Slough frequently engage Aik Saath to help build cohesion and promote integration, and the young volunteers are trained to run workshops and assemblies in these schools on themes such as racism, bullying and the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Over 400 young people have been Young Volunteers with Aik Saath over the past five years and at least 1,000 since the charity’s inception. In recent years, Aik Saath has expanded its model to include several exciting heritage projects.



Aik Saath’s mission is to work with people from all communities, faiths and backgrounds to promote and encourage peace, human rights and **community cohesion**





### 3 “17,000 reasons to remember”

This youth-led project commemorated stories of the Polish aircrew in the RAF to mark the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain called “17,000 Reasons to Remember: Commemorating the contribution of Polish Aircrew during WWII”.

Through this project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund between 2014 and 2015, Aik Saath set out to address the marginalisation of the Polish community in Slough, and to engage more Polish young people in mainstream youth provisions, where they tend to be under-represented. The project brought together young people from many different backgrounds through which they developed new skills, such as teamwork and communication, along with the technical skills associated with undertaking oral history research. The project aimed to teach young Polish people about the contribution and sacrifices made by the Polish aircrew to help restore a sense of pride in this community, whilst also helping these young people to understand their heritage better. Alongside, the project set out to inform or remind the wider public about the role of Polish people in the Second World War, thus helping to create stronger connections to the Polish community. Stories of the Polish aircrew were not previously well known in Slough.

18 young people from different backgrounds were recruited from schools and youth services across Slough, including a Polish Saturday School to deliver the project. Six peer leaders were recruited (Young Volunteers aged 16-21) who were responsible for overseeing the delivery of the project. The main activities of the project were workshops to build teamwork within the group led by the peer leaders, training sessions in oral history and storytelling led by professionals from the heritage sector, research visits to learn about Polish history, and interviews with veterans, the children of veterans, and key people linked to the RAF. The group then worked with a professional exhibition designer to develop what they had learnt into an exhibition, which was launched at RAF Northolt, followed by a two-month long display at Bentley Priory Museum. The exhibition consisted of 11 large, colourful exhibition panels exploring themes such as ‘The Journeys that Polish People Made’ and ‘Life after Wartime’, accompanied by a timeline of the war. Over 180 school children and 1,000 members of the public visited the exhibition over two months.



The project had a positive impact on young people from the Polish community as explained by Peter Sikora (who is himself Polish) from their partnership organisation MAPIS, which supported the project,

“It was very emotional for all of us, and especially young people...Young people were asking a lot of questions and we could see how proud they were to be a part of this programme.”<sup>18</sup>

**Peter Sikora, Creative Director at MAPIS**

At the same time, the project taught young people from other backgrounds about the role of Polish people in the War and engaged them with the Polish community.

“This project has really allowed me to personally engage with history and honestly it was a really humbling experience meeting such astonishing people and being able to share their stories.”<sup>19</sup>

**Young Peer leader at Aik Saath**

The project also helped the wider public in Slough to understand more about the Polish community's contribution to Britain. A comment in the exhibition visitor's book reads:

“Wonderful exhibition. We are grateful for what these brave men did and are happy to see their stories being shared with young people today.”<sup>20</sup>

As is the case with all Aik Saath's work, this project brought young people together from across cultural and ethnic divides to build understanding and work together. The external evaluation found that young people had learnt more about each other and that close friendships had developed between Polish young people and the other participants as a result.

“The presence of a parallel civil society in Slough makes living on the periphery a distinct possibility - it's possible to go to Polish school, be a member of the Polish scouts, get your hair cut at the Polish hairdresser, get your prescription from the Polish chemist and buy your food from the Polish supermarket... Hopefully this project has been a step towards bringing these young people into the heart of the community by working together with people and institutions that they would not normally have contact with.”<sup>21</sup>

**Rob Deeks, Director of Aik Saath**



## 4 “Chalvey Stories”

Building on the success of this and other heritage projects Aik Saath has run, the charity launched a new oral history project in 2017 called Chalvey Stories, working with 16 Roma young people aged 11-16 in Chalvey, one of Slough’s poorest and most diverse neighbourhoods.

Chalvey has traditionally been the entry point for new communities arriving in Slough and a large Roma community from Romania has settled here in recent years. About 50 young people from this community regularly attend Aik Saath’s ‘Chalvey Youth Café’, however, a lot of them are not attending school and there are significant tensions between the Roma community, local residents and police, particularly around anti-social behaviour. Some local people are struggling to adapt to and accept the Roma community’s cultural habits, such as meeting and socialising outside in large groups and playing loud music.

Through Chalvey Stories, Aik Saath set out to build respect and understanding between Roma young people and other Chalvey residents. Like the Polish project, a small group of Aik Saath’s Peer Leaders worked with Roma young people over several weeks to teach them about oral history and interviewing techniques.

They used ‘bite-sized’ fun and interactive activities, such as guessing games and opportunities to practice interviewing each other, to build skills. Because the project largely took place during regular drop-in Youth Café sessions, with the goal of maximising involvement of disengaged young people, the team had to work hard to maintain young people’s focus. The team came up with many creative and fun activities to increase the participants’ interest and capacity and through these young people came up with over 30 excellent questions. Focus was placed on teaching young people how to engage on a deeper level with interviewees, so that they could build rapport, and so that interviews were lively and interesting.

Ten local people who reflected Chalvey’s diversity were selected to feature in the project. This included local business people, professionals and other community members from a wider range of backgrounds, alongside individuals regarded as ‘pillars of the community’.

Roma young people shared what an enlightening experience it was to undertake the interviews. For example, one interviewee was somebody widely respected locally, who the young people had assumed was born into money. During the interview he shared his struggles with the young people and they were surprised to discover that his life story was in fact one of ‘rags to riches’, which they found incredibly inspiring. A local barrister, Kuljeet Singh Dobe, talked to the young people about the racism he had faced in school and about how he had overcome prejudice to be successful. The young people remarked that they felt that their own aspirations were raised by someone so successful living in their community.



Chalvey has traditionally been the entry point for new communities arriving in Slough and a large Roma community from Romania has settled here in recent years



Other interviewees spoke about their arrival in Slough and integration experiences, including those who had migrated from other counties, as well as an evacuee from World War Two. These stories moved the young people and they developed a new respect for the people they spoke to because of the project. Because of these interviews, young people not only gained a stronger understanding of Chalvey, they developed a whole new perspective on the people who live there and drew inspiration from their stories.

The project, which is funded by The Big Lottery’s Celebrate Programme with a grant of £5,000, via a partnership with the YMCA and Slough Borough Council, resulted in an exhibition in October 2017 called Chalvey Stories. Twelve large banners were created that told the stories of local people’s lives through the eyes of the Roma young people. An accompanying booklet was produced to mirror the exhibition, allowing a larger audience to be reached. The exhibition has been displayed in the local community centre and will also be shown in libraries, a shopping centre, and other sites around Slough.

Statutory services in Slough recognise that Aik Saath is in a unique position to engage hard to reach communities in ways that they cannot. Liz Jones, Neighbourhood Manager at Slough Borough Council, explains that Chalvey Stories has served as a bridge, not only between Roma young people and local residents, but also between the community and statutory services,

“Statutory organisations simply couldn’t have engaged with either group [Roma young people or members of the more settled community] as effectively or as positively as Aik Saath was able to.”

Liz Jones, Neighbourhood Manager at Slough Borough Council

Kulbir Brar, Slough LPA Community & Diversity Officer at Thames Valley Police, echoes this view, explaining that Chalvey Stories has had a positive impact on social integration both through building relationships and connecting people to services,

“Their weekly sessions have enabled young people from this community to integrate with other young people in the local area. The sessions have also provided other agencies, such as the local authority and the police, an opportunity to engage with an otherwise relatively hard to reach group.”

Kulbir Brar, Slough LPA Community & Diversity Officer at Thames Valley Police



## Isac Bujor, aged 13

Isac Bujor was involved in three of the interviews that formed the basis of the Chalvey Stories exhibition. He was born in Madrid and much of his family comes from Romania. He is a part of Slough's Roma community.

Isac explained that he enjoyed interviewing the older members of the community and finding out more about the local area, including its folklore:

“There is a river in Chalvey and I thought it had always been there – the way most rivers have always been there. I was shocked to find out it was man made! I liked hearing stories about the local area. I live next to a park called Stabmonk Park and I never understood why it was called this until the people we interviewed told us a legend about a monkey that was killed in Chalvey. I found out about how our area was affected by the Second World War. The interviews helped me understand the past and how things have changed in Slough and England.”

Isac hopes that his efforts will contribute to changing how people view his community and help change perceptions of Roma,

“Some people say that we [Roma] shouldn't be in this country. They don't accept us. I hope by doing this we will change how people see us. We are showing that we care.”



## 5 Conclusion

Aik Saath's success in building cohesion in Slough is rooted in its commitment to young people and its belief in young people's ability to lead change.

The charity was founded by young people and this has set a precedent for how it has functioned ever since. Aik Saath's development of creative heritage projects is a model that others working in the field of cohesion and integration could learn from and adopt.

These heritage projects have been very successful in celebrating diversity and drawing on the power of human stories to bring people together. Aik Saath's model for implementing heritage projects that build cohesion draws on tested approaches and create opportunities for the young participants to connect with those they would not ordinarily meet and speak to, including across generations. At the same time the young participants learning new things about their community and develop research and other skills and how to work constructively together.



To find out more visit [www.aiksaath.com](http://www.aiksaath.com)

Additional information about the project “17,000 Reasons to Remember...” can be found here: <https://reasonstoremember.com>

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# Rushmoor Borough Council: Supporting the integration of the newly arrived ex-Gurkha Nepali community

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## Summary

Rushmoor Borough Council has worked intensively to integrate a new and often vulnerable community into the borough. The approach has been one of strong coordination, and of equipping local people and groups to support integration efforts and to work collaboratively.

- The council has drawn upon the assets that exist within communities and focussed on finding ways to equip, support and coordinate new and existing local groups to implement effective integration efforts.
- The council and its partners have come up with creative ways to engage Nepali young people, who have served as a bridge between services and more difficult to reach members of the community, as well as employing “peer to peer” models more widely.
- Local voluntary sector and community groups report high levels of support from the council, which has channelled funding into their services and worked closely with them to increase capacity and impact.
- The council has invested heavily in building relationships with community leaders and small local groups, seeking to connect with people at every level, not just the “usual suspects”. This has given them tremendous local leverage.
- In the face of considerable local grievance, the council engaged face-to-face with adversarial groups to encourage cooperation, as well as distributing effective myth busting materials.
- When faced with growing conflict between young people, the council brought in external conflict resolution experts to deliver workshops and increase local peace-building capacity.
- The council’s Cohesion Forum has effectively supported and coordinated local partners and efforts.



## 1 Background

The borough of Rushmoor, in the south of England, covers 48 square kilometres and encompasses the towns of Aldershot and Farnborough. The area has a strong military history, with Aldershot considered to be the home of the British Army.

The 1st Battalion of the Gurkha Rifles (a division of soldiers recruited from Nepal) was based in the Rushmoor area for almost thirty years. As a result, a small number of ex-Gurkhas and their families had settled in the borough. Changes to legislation in 2004 and 2009 gave many more ex-Gurkha families the right to settle in the UK, leading to a rapid increase in the number of people moving to Rushmoor from Nepal. This influx of new arrivals, many of whom were older people, transformed the demographics of the borough dramatically, and neighbourhoods that had previously been overwhelmingly white working class, became over 10 per cent Nepali. The arrival of this new community presented significant challenges to Rushmoor Borough Council, both in terms of service delivery, and in relation to managing local responses to such a rapid demographic change.



Changes to legislation gave many more ex-Gurkha families the right to settle in the UK, leading to a rapid increase in the number of people moving to Rushmoor from Nepal.

## 2 Rushmoor Borough Council's approach

The council's approach to supporting the integration of this community can be summed up as one of learning and adapting over time, and of drawing upon the assets that already existed in communities, both in the established community and within the newly arrived Nepali population.

The approach taken by the council has also been one of strong coordination, it has sought to identify and empower local actors, equipping them with the resources they need to adapt and respond to challenges, and synchronising efforts, rather than taking on too much of the service delivery themselves. Rushmoor's experience is quite unusual, in that integration primarily concerned an older more vulnerable population. But this case study provides valuable lessons around how effective coordination and multi-partner working can have a fundamental impact on the success of local social integration efforts.

## 3 Resources

Prior to 2011 Rushmoor Borough Council had no dedicated funding in place to support the integration efforts of the ex-Gurkhas and their families.

In the face of growing challenges, the council appealed to the Government for support and was awarded £500,000 funding in November 2011 through the Gurkha Settlement Fund, additional funds to support cluster working with neighbouring authorities (£400,000), and some dedicated English Language support funding (£49,000). This funding was awarded in recognition of the extraordinary pressures Rushmoor was under, with the ex-Gurkhas and their families being predominantly older people with complex health and social care needs and limited capacity to develop language skills. This funding transformed the capabilities of the borough and neighbouring authorities to respond to local need, with funding spread across its different activities.



## 4 Rushmoor Borough Council activities

### English Language

The council recognised early on that the English language level of this community was always going to be low, reflecting the age of many of those arriving. However, they observed that several voluntary ESOL groups had started in the borough run by local people, particularly church groups, who wanted to support new arrivals. Recognising the potential of these efforts, the council consulted with these groups to identify how best to support them. They created an “ESOL Volunteers Forum” to facilitate cross-group learning, and enable volunteer teachers to share ideas and strategies, support each other, and exchange resources. There are now six active volunteer-run ESOL groups in Rushmoor, some of which engage local sixth form students from Nepali backgrounds to support with translation. The council has also enabled access to some limited funding for these groups. These local language groups have played an important role in helping older people in the Nepali community to feel less isolated and to learn basic English.

“ We wanted to encourage and support existing volunteer-led self-sustaining delivery models, as we knew the funding was short lived. Volunteers were financially supported to access formal language training as well as increasing the learning resources available for our groups. Years after their inception, thanks to the commitment and dedication of exceptional volunteers and our local learners, these groups continue to thrive, providing essential support to continued effective integration.”

**Louise Webber, Community Development Manager at Rushmoor Borough Council**



### Working with Rushmoor Citizens Advice

The arrival of such large numbers of people over a relatively short period of time has required the transfer of considerable amounts of information, including to people who are vulnerable, less likely to access services, and who have additional needs in terms of understanding and interacting with these services. Challenges have included: ensuring that people have access to information about housing and benefits; tackling the incorrect use of health services; and addressing a whole range of community safety issues.

The council's partnership with Rushmoor Citizens Advice (CA) has been fundamental. As the Nepali community began to grow, the CA in Aldershot found itself overwhelmed by demand for its services. The CA noticed that this community often visited their office in groups, and began to see patterns emerging in the types of support they needed.

The CA responded by adapting its traditional one-to-one confidential advice services to create an entirely Nepali-focussed provision that enables groups of Nepalis to seek advice together, responding to common concerns. This is a weekly drop-in service, offered on Wednesday mornings, staffed by a growing team of volunteers from Nepali backgrounds. Whilst still offering people access to the traditional confidential CA service should they need it, this weekly drop-in frees up resources to deliver its mainstream services to other clients. Around 30-40 people access this service each week.

The CA has also created a series of information videos in Nepalese, which play on loops in the reception area. The videos are extremely popular and were made by the CA in partnership with young people from the Nepali youth group “Naya Yuva” (New Youth). They helped older people in the community, who appear in the videos, to share their experiences and educate their peers about important issues. Leading on from this, the CA developed a further peer-to-peer provision, through which members of the community have been trained to provide information to others, with the goal of facilitating a sustainable process of knowledge transfer that builds the community’s resilience over time.

Additional specialist services, such as a dedicated domestic abuse service for the Nepali community and a weekly “bidding workshop” that provides information about how social housing bidding processes work, are further examples of how the CA has identified needs in this community and created specialised, innovative responses. Some of these activities have been initiated by volunteers from the Nepali community and the CA has been very successful in upskilling members of this community, some of whom have also gone on to create their own small community groups.

Funding channelled to these efforts from the council’s secured funds allowed the CA to employ a fulltime Nepali Case Worker, and a Nepalese speaking Customer Service advisor was seconded to the CA from the council. A representative from the council attends each Wednesday drop-in session and is an integral part of this service. The CA reports that their strong partnership with the Council has increased their level of influence in the community, reflecting a tendency in Nepali culture to recognise authority and status and to place importance on the “statutory voice.”

## Information Days

Alongside helping to support and facilitate CA services, Rushmoor Borough Council runs its own bi-annual information days, helping people to understand what services are available and how to use services correctly. The information days encompass educational seminars supported by service providers, such as police, fire service, hospitals and GPs, and the distribution of targeted communications in Nepalese. The information days help to reduce the burden otherwise placed on individual services. They also reassure the public that the council is actively engaged in supporting integration. This was particularly important in the early days, when numbers of new arrivals were at their peak and public concern was high. Increasingly the Information Days are supported by volunteers from the Nepali community.

## Fire Safety Project

Like the approach employed by CA, the council identified that young people in the Nepali community could serve as an important bridge between statutory services and the community, essentially serving as ‘community connectors’. There was a growing concern around fire safety in this community (due to cultural practices such as lighting oil lamps for Poojas or prayer ceremonies and cooking with large quantities of oil). The council facilitated engagement between the fire service and the community, leading to a fire service led project. As part of the project young volunteers from “Naya Yuva” (the Nepali youth group) were trained to carry out fire safety home checks and install smoke alarms in vulnerable Nepali households. These households are difficult for services to reach, due to a lack of English, and limited receptivity to messages around fire safety. The young people from Naya Yuva were able to identify vulnerable Nepali households and explain the project to those at risk in a way that they understood, whilst promoting the need for greater awareness and safety equipment. The project also created opportunities for young people to gain skills, with some going on to secure jobs in the public and voluntary sector.





## Choosing the right communication method

All the services described above have favoured oral transmission over the distribution of printed materials. This reflects the need to overcome challenges to understanding, not only related to low levels of English language and literacy in Nepalese, but also broader cultural differences. The council and its partners have identified that relaying the complexities and nuances of British culture, systems and processes, through straight interpretation and translated documents is too much for older people and that it is important to find ways to engage directly with people in a way that builds rapport and relates to people's understanding from their own culture. Stakeholders from different organisations in Rushmoor emphasise that peer-to-peer or community-led communication is much more effective. The efforts of Naya Yuva have been particularly celebrated, as young people have reached out to elders in their community to find ways to explain complex issues, essentially, "holding their hands" through the integration process. Rushmoor Borough Council and its partners have also served as a broker between the community and other services, particularly the police, where there is a level of distrust due to very different policing systems in Nepal and negative experiences linked to this.

## Dealing with tensions and myth busting

One of the greatest challenges the council has faced has been in addressing local grievance. Mounting anger locally about new arrivals found expression in racist graffiti, the creation of Facebook and other online groups voicing resentment about new arrivals, reports of planned protests, and inflammatory remarks in the media. Fights and other disturbances broke out between groups of white and Nepali youth. Narratives developed around the Nepali community either having unfair access to public services, or putting a strain on existing resources, alongside the propagation of demeaning myths about the community. The area was identified as fertile ground for the English Defence League and at risk from far-right extremism, with tensions beginning to escalate in 2011 at the height of incoming migration.

In Rushmoor, the speed with which the area changed was a key cause of tension, with people having limited time to adjust. Tensions were highest in the most deprived areas of the borough. Aldershot and Farnborough are small and medium sized towns, making new arrivals more noticeable than they would be in a city. Because older people from the Nepali community often favour being outdoors and frequently meet in groups to sit in parks or take long walks together (reflecting cultural habits from Nepal), the community were especially visible.

In the absence of other forums for people to air their grievances, Facebook pages critical of the new arrivals began to appear. These groups created opportunities for people to share their concerns and allowed myths about the community to gain traction. At the height of the tensions, these online forums had several thousand followers between them. This was the first time that Rushmoor Borough Council had faced community tensions on such a scale and they had no blueprint to draw from. Council staff met with those running the Facebook pages to understand their views, explain the facts, and to engage them in myth busting activities such as meeting with key Nepali community leaders. The largest of the Facebook groups allowed the council to join as a member and to monitor and post on the pages to correct inaccurate rumours. As a result, the council made some progress in creating counter-narratives.

“After the meeting with [the Facebook group] we also started to see some residents who would stick up for the Nepali community and put people straight, so myth busting started to happen on its own.”

**Sheila Limbu, Cohesion & Integration Partnership Support Officer at Rushmoor Borough Council**

The council also used its own social media and website to share accurate information about new arrivals alongside more general local community news.

Among the common myths that gained traction, was a recurrent theme about members of the community receiving preferential treatment in the allocation of social housing. The Council reviewed the facts relating to this claim and publicised accurate data around allocations to myth bust. They also promoted the fact that this new community were predominantly renting privately or purchasing their own homes. The council also created and distributed myth busting documents to partners, such as a leaflet entitled “Gurkha Migration: Answers to Common Questions,” which laid out the facts, particularly countering concerns around public resources and services.



Young people from Naya Yuva supported integration efforts by engaging in public information sessions, in which they explained to local people more about Nepali habits and customs to help them understand, for example, why the community was often seen out walking in the rain. It had been assumed by some that the older Nepali people who were out early walking in the Borough were destitute as they had been kicked out of local Bed and Breakfast accommodation whereas in fact they were simply very active walkers.

To tackle difficulties concerning young people, the council brought in the youth-led conflict resolution charity, Aik Saath, from nearby Slough, which delivered a varied programme of training across schools and youth groups over two years. In secondary schools, where some extreme attitudes were encountered, Aik Saath tied in conflict resolution skills with vocational training that brought young people from different backgrounds together. Aik Saath also built the capacity of Naya Yuva to serve as peace-builders in the community.

Reflecting on how local feeling has changed in recent years, stakeholders in Rushmoor report significant improvement. One example given related to Aldershot’s Thursday market, with Nepali respondents commenting that they once felt uncomfortable walking through the market, but now felt comfortable, and that some stallholders have even learnt basic phrases in Nepali. One stakeholder pointed out that the Cohesion Practitioners Forum meetings were once dominated by discussions about tackling youth violence. Today such issues are rarely mentioned. Local partners and stakeholders attributed this improvement to the pro-active approach of the council, particularly around myth busting, as well as people slowly adjusting to the change and the increasing capacity of services.

Despite the improvements, the council remains vigilant and academic observation from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University would suggest that the area is exhibiting signs of “passive tolerance” but has limited resilience to threats presented by further or sudden change.

## 5 Coordinating social integration in Rushmoor

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Social integration efforts in Rushmoor have drawn heavily on volunteers, for example, through the youth group Naya Yuva, Rushmoor Citizens Advice, and volunteer-led English language groups.

Volunteers have been a valuable resource in this context. The impact on the volunteers themselves in this context has also been significant, with younger Nepali people using the experience they gained through volunteering as stepping stones in their careers. The council has employed people from this community who gained skills through these experiences.

The Cohesion Practitioner Forum (formerly the Rapid Response Group, renamed to reflect a shift away from crisis management) has been central to the integration and cohesion efforts in Rushmoor. The Forum meets regularly to share learning and coordinate efforts. This Forum was described by partners and stakeholders as fundamental in helping their organisations understand the issues, develop individual and collaborative responses, and avoid duplication.

Fundamental to Rushmoor’s approach has been building mutual trust and respectful relationships with local community leaders. This has included attempts to broaden engagement, seeking to involve people at every level. Sheila Limbu explains,

“I think at the beginning [the community] thought “the Council only comes to us when there’s a problem.” But slowly, and it has taken us years, we have built up these relationships. You’ve just got to listen to [people] and maintain the relationships, and then hear what the concerns are for the community.”

**Sheila Limbu, Rushmoor Borough Council**

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As this case study illustrates, the council and its partners have engaged people from all sections of the community, this has been one of its key strengths. As Jamie Beaton from Rushmoor Borough Council reflects, “Initially we were part of the untrusted,” but through ongoing efforts the community’s attitude has changed.

Linked to this are the partnerships that Rushmoor has forged with local groups and the voluntary sector, with key lessons around the need to set out plans for long-term engagement. What the council observed was that, whilst there is often a willingness to engage at crisis point, it is important to put in place frameworks that set out long-term engagement, as the agenda and priorities in organisations can shift.

To address this, Rushmoor have sought to identify a shared purpose with partners. One of the things they experienced was over-reliance on committed individuals within organisations, and whilst these “champions” have been paramount, services often experience changes in key personnel. Therefore, they have learnt that it is important to secure organisational commitment at the top level. Much of the council’s ongoing work is around building a long-term commitment to integration and cohesion locally.

## Nilam Rai, Founding member of Naya Yuva (New Youth)

“I came to the UK when I was 15 years old. I was lucky, my English was pretty good, which helped but I still needed to adapt to the UK and the culture here. I went to University here and had family and friends nearby, which helped. It wasn’t like that for everyone coming to the UK from Nepal. Things were difficult, particularly in those early days for new arrivals. There were tensions between groups of young people and issues with the older Nepali community too.

Our community needed help to adapt to living in the UK and a group of us (Nepali young people) wanted to help however we could. That’s how Naya Yuva (New Youth) started – young people trying to support our community to integrate better – we did all sorts of cultural awareness and community fundraising projects working with the Council, the Police, Rushmoor Voluntary Service and the Fire Service. Seven years later, Naya Yuva is still going strong and things in Rushmoor are so much better now.

For me personally, I got loads out of helping. I always wanted to get a job that made a difference, so applied to join the police in 2013. I got in and have been working for Hampshire Constabulary for four years now. I started off as a PCSO and now I am a police constable. I probably wouldn’t have had the confidence to go for it if it wasn’t for the experience gained from my community work.”



## 6 Conclusion

A wide number of local groups in Rushmoor spoke highly of the coordinated effort of Rushmoor Borough Council, pointing out that everybody in the borough had come together to find solutions to challenges that were entirely new to them.

The council found itself in the position of tackling considerable ill feeling locally about new arrivals. It addressed this through engaging directly with adversarial groups, distributing myth busting documents, bringing in external experts from the field of conflict resolution to work with young people and build local peace-building capacity, and engaging those who had the capability to influence people locally to work together to devise strategies and transform conflict.

To promote integration, the council has played a strong coordinating role, using forums to bring actors together, and has identified actors and groups in the community who have the potential to play key roles in service delivery, equipping them with the resources they need and supporting a coordinated effort. Young people’s role in integration efforts in this context have been central, illustrating that young people can serve as an important bridge between services and older people. The Gurkha Settlement Fund was central to the success of Rushmoor’s efforts, illustrating how dedicated funding for social integration can have a transformative impact.



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# Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Migrant Workers PCSOs: Tackling modern slavery and supporting the integration of migrant workers

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## Summary

Since 2010, Devon and Cornwall Police has had in post two Migrant Worker Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) covering Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (CIOS). The scheme was extended in 2015 to include a third PCSO in Mid Devon. The intensive work of these PCSOs has had a positive impact on tackling the exploitation of migrant workers and on promoting integration.

- The PCSOs have built up extensive links with businesses, community groups and individuals from migrant communities, enabling the police to intervene early in cases where migrants are at risk from exploitation and other crimes.
- Through challenging misconceptions about the police held by migrants, the reporting rate of crime by people in these communities has increased.
- The Support Officers educate migrant workers about their rights and responsibilities as UK residents, as well as connecting them to opportunities.
- The PCSOs are tackling the causes of hate crime by educating young people about the roles and contributions made by migrant workers in Devon and Cornwall.
- The team are often the first to become aware of issues affecting migrants, and, by working in partnership with a range of services, can coordinate effective responses.
- Since being in post, the PCSOs have succeeded in removing the licenses of several ‘gangmasters’, and their work has led to the investigation of a number of serious crimes.



# 1 Background

It is estimated that Cornwall has a migrant workforce of between 20,000 and 25,000 people. Limited understanding of British systems and processes means that migrant workers arriving in the UK often need additional support to understand how to access basic services and to integrate more successfully into British society.

This group is at risk from the threats posed by modern slavery, including exploitation by rogue gangmasters, human trafficking and illegal and exploitative working conditions. These crimes often go undetected due to a lack of understanding of the issues by the public, employers, agencies and services.

## 2 Overview

Many migrant workers in Cornwall are young males under the age of 30. These workers often come from Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland as well as from Spain, and include those from Roma backgrounds.

The roles these migrant workers fulfil are primarily in the food industry (often working in factories), in hospitality, and in the agricultural sector. Smaller numbers work in the fishing and care industries. Large numbers of these workers are seasonal or temporary. Devon has a more settled migrant population than Cornwall and is home to more families, however many are still employed in agriculture and by factories.

Three dedicated Migrant Worker Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) currently operate across three regions in the south west of England: East Cornwall; West Cornwall; and Mid Devon. The PCSO roles were created following a successful bid to the Migrant Impact Fund in 2010. Devon and Cornwall Police recognised that there was a need to interact more directly with the migrant population to protect migrants from falling victim to exploitation and other crimes, as well as helping migrants to know their rights, and to understand systems and process that prevent them from contravening the law themselves. The police were particularly aware of cases of the exploitation of migrant workers by rogue gangmasters and of human trafficking, and recognised that it was very difficult to address these and other crimes without interacting directly with migrant communities.

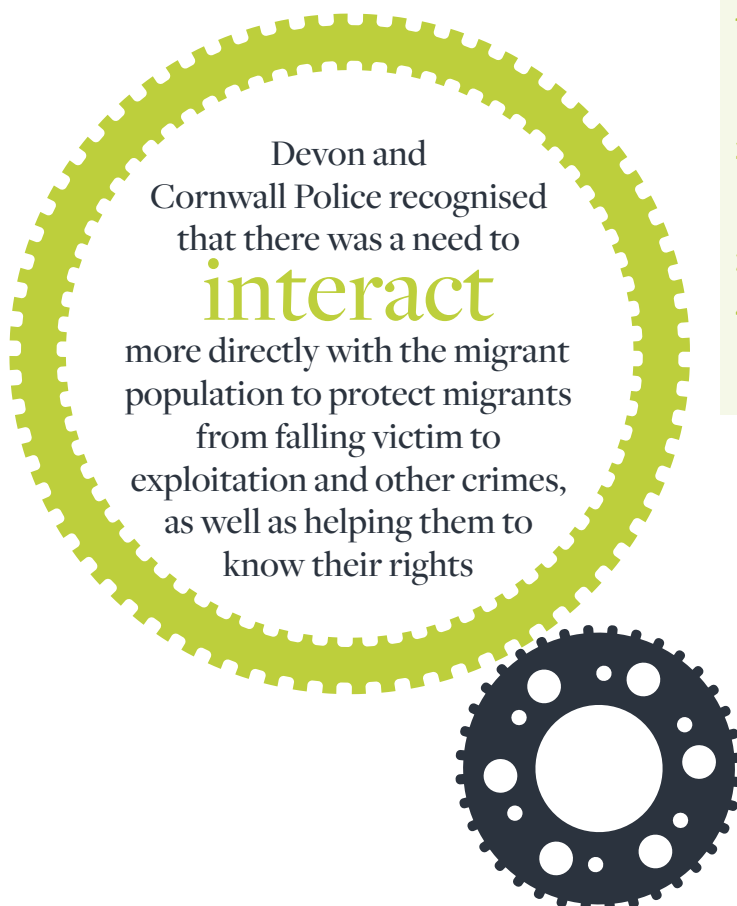
## 3 Activities

When the PCSOs first came into post their primary objective was to interact as much as possible with migrant communities.

It was crucial that the PCSOs came to be known by the migrant population and by the businesses and services that employ and support migrants. Much of the PCSOs early work involved researching, phoning, and visiting a vast number of places of work, agencies, colleges and community groups.

**This created a strong foundation from which their work has evolved in four key areas:**

- 1 Changing perceptions of the police in the migrant community;
- 2 Increasing the capacity of businesses and agencies that employ migrants to protect migrant's rights and to recognise and report crimes;
- 3 Tackling hate crime;
- 4 Providing information and support, and serving as a bridge between the migrant population and other services.



## Changing perceptions of the police

One of the key issues that undermines effective prevention of exploitation of migrant workers, is the reluctance of this community to interact with the police and report crimes. Much of the migrant population in Devon and Cornwall come from countries with higher levels of police mistrust and bribery and corruption. PCSO Steve Edser explains, when he first came into the post, whenever the PCSOs entered a room of migrant workers, “people would take one look at us and look right to where the exits were.” The perception amongst the migrant community was that the police were to be distrusted, rather than being an agency advocating for their rights.

The early efforts of the PCSOs were therefore focussed on breaking down these barriers, and this work is ongoing. The PCSOs give regular talks about their roles in community centres, colleges and businesses, and organise informative drop-ins and other events specifically for the migrant population. In Cornwall, the PCSOs have built up a very active Facebook page with the explicit goal of “Promoting integration and looking out for the welfare of our Migrant Community.”<sup>22</sup> Alongside these tangible activities are the less obvious activities the PCSOs are engaged in where they simply “mix in” with migrant communities.

The PCSOs make themselves highly visible and available in as many of the settings where migrant workers live, work and socialise as possible. Reflecting on his seven years of work as a Migrant Worker PCSO, Steve explains,

“I’ve made friends in this community, I’ve mixed with people socially. Now I’ve got people who phone me and say, “Steve I just want to ask you a question...” and it’s brilliant.”

**Steve Edser, Migrant Worker PCSO East Cornwall**

In forging these links, the PCSOs have learnt a lot about different communities’ languages, cultures and customs, developing an almost unique overview and appreciation of cultural nuances. The PCSOs can tell you in which houses shoes should be removed before entry, on which days cultural holidays are celebrated, about the foods of eastern and central Europe and other parts of the world, as well as knowing many phrases in a variety of languages. Though these may seem like minor feats, the attention the PCSOs have played to understanding and appreciating people’s cultures is a key driver of their success. The goal has been to communicate to migrant communities in Cornwall that PCSOs are people under their uniforms, and through this approach, to demonstrate the approach of the UK police as well as how to contact the police and report crimes.





## Increasing the capacity of businesses and agencies to protect migrants' rights and to recognise and report crimes

The PCSOs have forged relationships with all businesses that employ significant numbers of migrants, such as factories and farms, alongside those who act as employment agencies for migrants. Through this approach, the PCSOs have educated these employers and agencies about the laws that affect migrants, and about how they are at risk. They have forged mutually beneficial relationships so that employers can anonymously share information with the PCSOs whenever they have a concern about one of their workers. Some examples of this have been of employers observing that large numbers of workers with the same home address, signalling that they may be victims of exploitation, may have been trafficked, or may be living in overcrowded Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs), posing risks to health and safety. Other cases include employers reporting to the PCSOs that they are concerned a worker may be a victim of domestic abuse or trafficking, or cases where workers have not shown up for work for some days, and there are concerns for their welfare. In such cases, the PCSOs make enquiries to establish whether there is cause for concern, and where it is not a police matter, refer cases to relevant agencies.

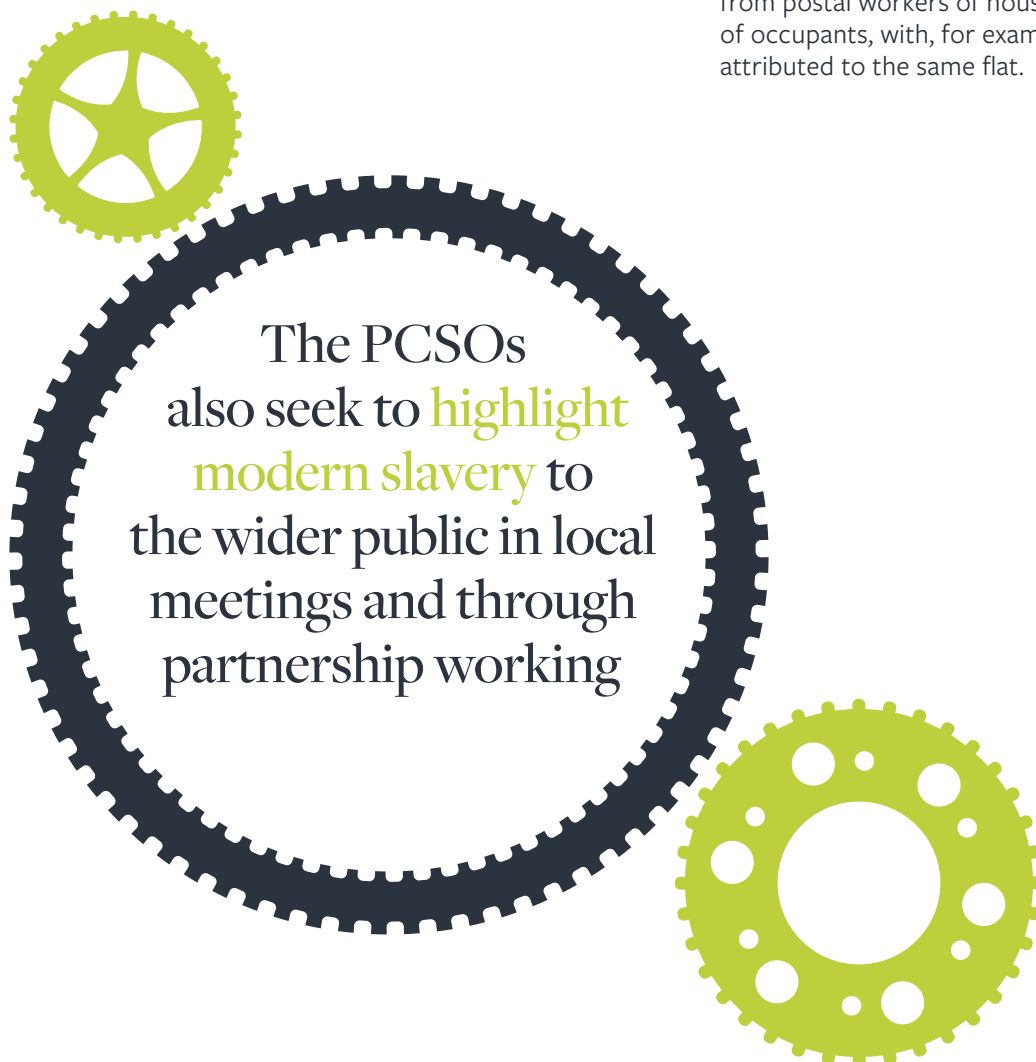
Prior to the PCSOs being in post most of these cases would have been overlooked, simply because businesses did not understand the issues or did not know who to approach. Steve explains,

“it’s just this ethos of businesses being able to say, “we’ve got a problem, what do you reckon?” And once you get that, once you get the businesses talking to you, once you get all the agencies working together, then you get results.”

**Steve Edser, Migrant Worker PCSO East Cornwall**

The PCSOs recall cases, in which they have given talks at businesses or agencies and a year or more later have been contacted by people who attended expressing concern about a person who may be a victim of trafficking or exploitation. Evidently, without the awareness raising and education around recognising the signs of modern slavery, such concerns would never be raised.

Through a recent initiative, the PCSOs have also briefed postal staff in Devon and Cornwall about how to recognise the signs of modern slavery. Postmen and women on their rounds now seek to be aware of certain signs which may indicate suspicious activity and to contact the PCSOs. Among the outcomes of this so far have been reports from postal workers of households with large numbers of occupants, with, for example, as many as 15 names attributed to the same flat.



### Tackling hate crime

A significant part of the PCSO's work is educating the public about the roles played by the migrant community in Devon and Cornwall and about their contribution to the economy. The PCSOs give frequent talks in colleges, reflecting the fact that young people are the main perpetrators of hate crime in the UK. The PCSOs explain their roles to the young people and educate them about why their work is needed. They tell them about why migrants come to the UK, about the contribution migrants make, and about the challenges they face. In one of their talks they even get the young people picking rows of imaginary daffodils, explaining that migrant workers spend up to 11 hours a day in the fields picking, often in the rain. The PCSOs get the young people to reflect on whether they would want to do such jobs and the physically demanding nature of them. The purpose of this approach is to get young people thinking critically about the common myths about migrants and to build their own understanding and appreciation of the migrant population in Devon and Cornwall. The PCSOs also educate migrant communities about how to respond to and report hate crime, and support hate crime victims.

### Acting as a bridge between the migrant population and other services

The PCSOs are in a unique position to serve as a link and liaison between the migrant population and other services, and to share information with the migrant population directly. Among the many information activities, they engage in are: the creation and distribution of information-based welcome packs to migrant workers; the creation of public awareness posters and leaflets in native languages addressing a range of issues (such as the need to insure vehicles or wear seatbelts); and the organisation of huge numbers of talks, events and drop-ins that connect migrant workers to services and educate them about their rights and obligations. Drop-ins take place in locations as diverse as Cornish pastry factories, meat processing plants and fisheries, and since 2016, the PCSOs have coordinated “Action Weeks”, where they visit agricultural workers in fields. During these visits they find out more about the workers, establish if they are happy in their employment and wearing the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and allow them to share any concerns, for example about accommodation or working conditions.



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It was crucial that the PCSOs came to be known by the **migrant population** and by the businesses and services that employ and support migrants

The PCSOs work closely with the Migrant Workers Action Group (MIGWAG), a forum for all services that impact on migrants in Cornwall. Through MIGWAG, the PCSOs share information about any concerns with other agencies and help coordinate joined up responses. One example given during this research was of a takeaway restaurant that had been flagged up to a PCSO as placing staff at risk. The PCSO coordinated with the health and safety agency to facilitate a visit, whereupon extremely hazardous working conditions were discovered. Recently, a three-day operation in Mid Devon brought together personnel from the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), the immigration service, the police, Environmental Health, private sector housing, and the Licensing Service to attend over 30 locations identified as of concern. The operation uncovered issues ranging from hazardous wiring and fire risks posed to residents, through to the discovery of a child who was a victim of trafficking and who had been bought into slavery in the UK. The PCSOs also seek to highlight modern slavery to the wider public in local meetings and through partnership working. This includes educating police and local council staff about what modern slavery is and about how to identify it and act accordingly. The team attends events by anti-trafficking charities such as Unchosen and Restore and supports their efforts, alongside using their materials to promote awareness.

“The Migrant Worker PCSOs in Devon and Cornwall are a valuable tool in the fight against Modern Slavery. The delivery of timely intelligence and their integration with the migrant worker community has provided an excellent springboard for the GLAA to engage with the migrant workers and their employers.”

**Martin Jones – Investigating Officer,  
Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority**

### Using social media

The aforementioned CIOS Migrant Workers Facebook page for Cornwall has over 1,200 friends and is an important part of operations. Not only does it allow the PCSOs to reach the migrant population with information and advice, it enables people to send messages anonymously to the PCSOs. This has even resulted in people reporting hate crime, particularly in cases where they were unsure who to contact. Following the result of the UK's referendum on membership of the European Union, the PCSOs have used the Facebook page as a place to reassure migrants in Cornwall.

## ‘Miss L’

“I arrived in the UK from Poland 14 years ago and have been living in Cornwall for the past 12 years. I came here on holiday and fell in love with it.

Before Brexit I never experienced racism. Maybe the odd comment here and there, but nothing serious. After Brexit, my neighbours, who I had been living next door to for two years without any problems, started to become aggressive towards me. I had racist and obscene graffiti written outside my property telling me to “go home”. Then I had my door kicked in. My son was bullied in the street by my neighbours’ children. It was as though, after Brexit, my neighbours felt that they had the right to be racist because of how the country had voted.

The police got involved and there was a point at which they were visiting my home once or twice a week. Though they were helpful, they were busy, and they couldn’t be there all the time. I found out about PCSO Steve Edser through a Polish website and I contacted him out of desperation.

He visited me at home and I explained the situation. Since then he has been brilliant. When things were at their worst, he would check in with me regularly, and when I started a process of mediation with my neighbours, and there were problems, I would text him for advice. The most important thing is that I no longer feel alone – I know that if I have a problem, he is there looking out for me.

When you are a victim of a crime like this, it is easy to feel like you are just a crime number. The Migrant PCSOs make you feel like an individual. I really hope that there are more PCSOs put in post to support migrant communities in the UK because they are very much needed. Everybody in the Polish community knows PCSO Steve, he is like a local celebrity!”



## 4 Conclusion

The PCSOs have played a key role in protecting migrants in Cornwall from becoming victims of crime and have helped to remove people from cases of modern slavery and exploitation.

Because of this success the PCSOs have visited other police forces in the country and facilitated fact finding visits to Cornwall to share best practices and to advise other forces on how to integrate Migrant Worker PCSOs into their teams. The Migrant Worker PCSOs have even travelled to Romania and Hungary to work with the police in these countries to share best practices for working with Roma communities. The PCSOs have built up a unique level of knowledge and a toolbox of successful approaches that could be employed by others seeking to tackle modern slavery through effective responses rooted in local communities.

The PCSOs  
have built up a **unique  
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others



# Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.britac.ac.uk/call-evidence-local-actions-social-integration>
- 2 <http://www.bacaproject.org.uk/what-we-do/theory-of-change>
- 3 Department for Education (2016), Children looked after in England including adoption: 2015 to 2016. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2015-to-2016>
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- 6 ECPAT UK (2016), Heading back to harm: A study on trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK Available here: <https://www.ecpat.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=875b65b5-08d4-4e9f-a28c-331d1421519f>
- 7 Every Child Matters (ECM) is a policy and framework put in place by the Government to help safeguard children and to promote their positive development.
- 8 Foundation for Social Improvement (Forthcoming), *Baca Impact Report 2017*.
- 9 Foundation for Social Improvement (Forthcoming), *Baca Impact Report 2017*
- 10 For more on Teaching Recovery Techniques, please visit: <http://www.childrenandwar.org/resources/teaching-recovery-techniques-trt/>.
- 11 Adapted from Foundation for Social Improvement (forthcoming), *Baca Impact Report*.
- 12 Black, Minority, Ethnic and Refugee (BMER)
- 13 See e.g. Council of Europe (2014) Report on discrimination of Roma children in education Available here: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_childdiscrimination\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_childdiscrimination_en.pdf) for a detailed exploration of these themes.
- 14 Makaton is a communication technique that uses signs and symbols to help those who do not speak English
- 15 Refugee Action (2016) Let Refugees Learn: Challenges and opportunities to improve language provision to refugees in England Available from: <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/letrefugeeslearnfullreport.pdf> and Wonder Foundation (2016) Empowerment Through Education: Women Breaking the English Barrier Available from: <http://wonderfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/Resources/Women%20Breaking%20the%20English%20Barrier%20%28Full%20Report%20Digital%29.pdf>
- 16 *AntiUniversity Now* is an experimental festival that provides a platform for people to organise free alternative learning events in public spaces
- 17 <https://www.roughguides.com/gallery/the-worlds-friendliest-cities-as-voted-by-you/>
- 18 Helen Giles (2015), Evaluation Report: 17,000 Reasons to Remember: Commemorating the contribution of Polish Aircrew during WWII Aik Saath's Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots Project. Available here: <https://reasonstoremember.com/project-evaluation.pdf>
- 19 *ibid.*
- 20 *ibid.*
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 See: <https://www.facebook.com/ciosmigrantworkersteam> and <https://www.facebook.com/mel.middevonmigrantteam>

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